

## Abstract

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### **Use of Electronic and Social Media to Promote Equity in Breastfeeding Support: Perceptions of Minnesota WIC Peer Counselors**

**Leslie Kummer, MD, FAAP**<sup>1</sup>, Linda Dech, MPH, IBCLC<sup>2</sup>, Claire Cunningham, MSW, MPH<sup>3</sup>, Joni Geppert, MPH and Marcia McCoy, MPH

(1)University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, (2)Minnesota Department of Health, Saint Paul, MN, (3)University of Minnesota School of Public Health

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**Background:** The Minnesota Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Peer Breastfeeding Support Program has a history of reducing disparities in breastfeeding outcomes among participants. Text messaging is an emerging method for contacting clients and reaching under-served populations. Concerns about data privacy have led to policies restricting texting by employees. The aim of this qualitative study was to understand: 1) What modes of communication clients prefer to use, and why; 2) How different modes of communication affect the quality of breastfeeding support; 3) What concerns clients, peers, and managers have regarding confidentiality when using mobile communication. **Methods:** We recruited participants through purposive convenience sampling and conducted 7 focus groups with peers and 5 interviews with program managers from a mix of urban and rural agencies. Peers had worked with the program for 1-13 years (mean: 4.8 years). Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analyzed using Thematic Analysis. Validity of the results was supported through triangulation and team analysis. **Results:** Preliminary results suggest that communication preferences among program clients are shifting toward texting, with interest in using social media and video chat applications to connect with peers. Employee-client communication policies may not have kept up with this social change. Themes include: "Flexibility in Communication is Key," "Texting has Limitations but is Essential for Young Clients," "Confidentiality in the Social Media Age," and "Peer Breastfeeding Support Requires Time—and Funding." **Conclusions:** The Minnesota WIC Peer Breastfeeding Support Program provides critical access to breastfeeding support for women at high risk for early cessation. Maintaining client-centered services will require adaptation to social changes favoring use of electronic and social media, while maintaining client confidentiality and data security. Further research and policy analysis are needed to explore the effects of electronic and social media policy on program participation and breastfeeding outcomes.

Assessment of individual and community needs for health education Communication and informatics Planning of health education strategies, interventions, and programs Public health or related organizational policy, standards, or other guidelines Social and behavioral sciences

