



**BlueCross BlueShield
of Mississippi**

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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Meredith V. Bailess
601-664-4783

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Hosts National Health Experts in Support of Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative

FLOWOOD, Miss. – The birth of a baby is one of the most exciting moments of a parent's life, fueled with many emotions during the labor and delivery experience. With the joys of welcoming a new family member, parents can often be unsure about many of the experiences and procedures they make decisions about in the hospital. That's why the Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi Baby-Friendly Initiative is supporting parents by focusing on what's best for newborns.

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi is encouraging all delivering Network Hospitals to earn the Baby-Friendly Hospital Designation. The Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative is a global program that encourages and recognizes delivering facilities that provide evidence-based maternity care with the goal of achieving optimal infant feeding outcomes and mother/baby bonding.

“Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi recognizes the importance of a healthy start in life supported by high quality care for mothers and infants throughout pregnancy and the childbirth experience,” said Sarah Broom, M.D., Medical Director, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi. “We believe it is important for all hospitals that deliver babies in Mississippi to give care that is grounded in the scientific evidence that mother baby bonding and breastfeeding lower the risk of certain diseases and result in improved health for both mothers and babies. A mother who delivers at a Baby-Friendly USA-designated hospital is educated about these facts in a safe and personal manner.”

Nationally-recognized health experts and representatives from Network Hospitals gathered on November 14, 2016 at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi to discuss the significant importance of this initiative and further support hospitals in their efforts to earn this designation.

“Mississippi has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the nation, and this contributes to real health consequences in our population like higher mortality rates in preterm infants and greater risks for conditions like obesity and diabetes,” said Charlene Collier, M.D., Mississippi State Department Health. “In order to see a significant, state-wide increase in breastfeeding in Mississippi, it is critical for hospital systems to work collaboratively, simultaneously and using evidence-based practices such as those supported by the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative.”

Executive Director of Baby-Friendly USA, Trish MacEnroe, offered insight into the benefits of obtaining Baby-Friendly Hospital designation for Mississippi hospitals.

“Implementation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative creates a hospital environment that gives mothers the knowledge, skills and confidence to successfully feed, care for and bond with

their babies,” said MacEnroe. “Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi, CHAMPS and the State of Mississippi are to be commended for the incredible work they are doing to help babies get the best possible start in life. I wish them all much success with this work.”

Sherry Pitts, CEO, Merit Health Women’s Hospital, shares the perspective of a Mississippi Network Hospital.

“Doing the right thing for both mother and baby is always our priority,” Pitts said. “We’ve embarked on this journey not only as a single hospital, but as a system of hospitals sharing both educational and operational resources.”

Lori Feldman-Winter, M.D., MPH, is Professor of Pediatrics at Cooper Medical School of Rowan University and the Division Head of Adolescent Medicine at The Children’s Regional Hospital at Cooper University Healthcare in Camden, New Jersey, who currently serves as American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) representative to the United States Breastfeeding Committee and as a member of the AAP Task Force on SIDS. Dr. Feldman-Winter served as the Physician Champion of the New Jersey Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative and offers her thoughts on the potential impact for Mississippi mothers and babies.

“As a physician lead for CHAMPS and co-author of the AAP’s Safe Sleep Policies, it’s important for the health of Mississippi to collaborate on the Baby-Friendly Initiative and work to promote breastfeeding and to decrease infant mortality rates,” Dr. Feldman-Winter said.

In the fall of 2015, Forrest General Hospital, located in Hattiesburg, became Mississippi’s first hospital to earn the Baby-Friendly Hospital designation. Currently, 35 of 40 Mississippi delivering hospitals are on the pathway to achieving this designation.

“Since earning the Baby-Friendly Hospital Designation, we have seen a significant increase in breastfeeding initiation,” said Tangela Boutwell, R.N., Director of Women and Children, Forrest General Hospital. “Baby-Friendly gave us the tools to educate our staff and help our mothers successfully begin breastfeeding and reach their goals.”

Communities and Hospitals Advancing Maternity Practices (CHAMPS) is a breastfeeding-focused initiative geared toward improving maternal and child health outcomes through promotion of Baby-Friendly practices. CHAMPS works with hospitals to help them through the pathway to achieve designation.

“As we have worked with Mississippi hospitals over the last two years, we have seen them embracing evidence-based practices resulting in reduced disparities in care and an increase in the number of breastfeeding mothers,” said Anne Merewood, CHAMPS Project Director and Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center. “The results of our collaboration with Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi, the Mississippi State Department of Health and our participating hospitals have been very rewarding.”



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Encouraging the Baby-Friendly Hospital designation is part of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Mississippi's Maternity Quality Model, which is aligned with Blue Distinction Maternity Care, to support healthy mothers and healthy babies. The first phase of the Maternity Quality Model was the launch of the 39 Weeks Initiative, introduced in January 2015, to reduce early-term elective deliveries before 39 weeks gestation with no medical reason.

To learn more about our women's health initiatives, including the 39 Weeks Initiative, Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative and the benefits of breastfeeding, visit www.bcbsms.com and click the Women's Health link in the 'Be Healthy' section.

Event photos and captions available for download:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mecw83szabjb88a/AABHPfwyiTmBwFsTpeJfqoSra?dl=0>

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