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Effect of Human Milk Feedings on the Length of Hospital Stay in Very Low Birth Weight Infants

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Introduction:
Very low birth weight (VLBW) infants are considered a very vulnerable population. Extended hospitalization in VLBW infants is associated with increased costs, an increased risk of nosocomial infections, and a disruption in the normal newborn-family relationship. Previous research indicates that the provision of breast milk is associated with a decreased rate of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) and nosocomial infections. The purpose of this study is to describe
the effects breast milk has on length of hospital stay in VLBW infants. We hypothesize that the use of breast milk will decrease the length of hospital stay for VLBW infants in the NICU.

Method(s):
Sixty VLBW infants born at less than thirty weeks gestation were sampled by convenience from a Level III NICU. Using a descriptive comparative design, a retrospective chart review was conducted for two groups. Group one received greater than 50% provision of breast milk. Group two received exclusively formula. Both groups were then compared based on length of hospital stay.

Results:

Discussion:
Statistical analyses are currently under way
If breast milk is shown to decrease the length of hospital stay for VLBW infants this would suggest the need and benefit of educating families about the importance of early and consistent use of breast milk. These findings may provide motivation for mothers to provide breast milk for their infants. Furthermore, it would warrant further research on the use of breast milk banks, lactation consultants and other breast-feeding aides.

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