



## PRESS RELEASE

### **WCMC-Q Pediatrician Discusses Breastfeeding: Benefits and Challenges**

**Doha, February 17, 2010** – Although social trends and the fast pace of modern life can distract from it, the tradition of breastfeeding is one that offers many benefits to mother, baby and society, according to Dr. Amal Khidir, assistant professor of pediatrics at WCMC-Q. In her contribution to the WCMC-Q Medicine and U lecture series, Dr. Khidir explained to an attentive audience the basic facts about breastfeeding and why it's widely considered a healthy practice. She also discussed practical challenges and possible solutions involving family, health care community, policy makers and the general public.

Although there is not enough research or data published to give solid figures on the incidence of breastfeeding, Dr. Khidir said it is clear by her observations and the studies published that there is a decline in breastfeeding throughout the region. She referred especially to the first six months of the baby's development—a window of time where exclusive breastfeeding is important, according to the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics. In cases where mothers are discouraged or giving up easily, she said health practitioners at every level can help to empower them with information that may motivate them further.

“It used to be in the US that women were not permitted to breastfeed in public, but this changed right as developing countries picked up the trend,” Dr. Khidir said. “This issue, locally, requires knowledge as well as enthusiasm and passion on the part of the entire medical community and the community at large.”

Holding a thick reference book up for the audience to see, Dr. Khidir noted the abundance of research and scientific information on breastfeeding but said she'd like to focus on basic benefits to mother and baby, and the simple yet enlightening information that people can go out and use.

The doctor first described the way the mother's body produces milk according to the baby's needs, in a way that is calibrated based on the number of feedings and amount of milk consumed over the course of the first days. She explained that the first two weeks

are a critical time to set up and maintain breastfeeding. This window of time is also when challenges peak and is thus the time when the mother requires the most support.

“Breastfeeding is a dynamic process,” she explained. “I highly discourage any interference in the breastfeeding schedule over the first two weeks. During that time the baby’s system and the mother’s system are adjusting to one another and trying to figure out how to do this. Each mother and each baby is different and so the approach should be individualized.

Although companies try to produce formulas close to breast milk, Dr. Khidir said that in terms of immune-building properties and digestibility, the packaged version doesn’t come close to what’s produced by mom.

“Even if companies try to mimic the molecules protein by protein, they are not there yet,” Dr. Khidir explained. “Also, most of the protein in the breast milk is whey protein, and the formula is made mainly of casein. There is a difference in structure between these two proteins, how they are digested and how readily the body can use them. Even the fat in the mother’s milk is formulated in a way that matches what the baby needs. Furthermore, breast milk changes as the baby grows.”

In addition to nutritional, brain development and immunity benefits, Dr. Khidir explained how breastfeeding relates to hormones within the mother’s body as well as the important connection between mother and baby.

“This can help her lose weight actually and it helps parts of her body return to normal size within the first few months,” she said. “And then the most important part of breastfeeding is the bonding—the skin-to-skin bond stimulates a lot in mother’s body and baby’s body.”

Dr. Khidir stressed that breastfeeding depends not only on mom but also on dad, the medical community and the community at large. For example, she said fluid intake, as simple as water, and rest are key factors in the mother’s ability to produce milk. If the father encourages the mother to drink fluids—in a supportive way and not a punitive way—and takes care of the baby for even an hour a day so she can rest, she said this would make a big difference.

In the end, every woman and every baby is different and Dr. Khidir said that she counsels them according to their unique circumstances and advises women and their families and health care providers to discuss this topic in the same way.

“The mother has the right to decide how she wants to feed her baby,” she said. “Our role together is to help her make an informed decision after we empower her with evidenced-based, accurate information.”

*Ends*

## NOTES TO EDITORS

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WCMC-Q offers an innovative program of pre-medical and medical studies leading to the Cornell University MD degree. Teaching is by Cornell and Weill Cornell faculty, including physicians at Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) who hold Weill Cornell appointments.

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