

LATCH (Lactation Advice thru Texting Can Help)

Exclusive breastfeeding rates among mothers participating in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Supplemental feeding program are lower than for other mothers in the United States. Thus, there is a need to reach out and improve breastfeeding support among low-income women. Mobile technology, in particular text messaging, is emerging as a promising platform for communicating with patients, including low-income populations. In fact, WIC breastfeeding peer counselors have noted that many moms will only connect on a text message agenda and sometimes it is the only way to reach moms. This study, which will be co-led by Professor Rafael Pérez-Escamilla and Dr. Nurit Harari from the Yale School of Public Health, will test the effectiveness of a web-based two-way texting intervention, whose feasibility has been successfully piloted, to improve exclusive breastfeeding rates among WIC mothers. This texting intervention was designed to provide both breastfeeding education (through an automated texting schedule) and to improve communication between WIC mothers and breastfeeding peer counselors (via an affordable two-way messaging platform) during pregnancy, perinatally and postnatally. This intervention was designed to be used as an adjunct tool by breastfeeding peer counselors. This unique texting platform allows for all text-based communication to be recorded. Thus, lactation consultants and WIC supervisors can monitor and supervise text based communications and can help them triage home visits. The specific aims of this study are to determine if the texting intervention, named LATCH (Lactation Advice thru Texting Can Help), improves exclusive breastfeeding rates during the first 6 months postpartum among WIC mothers being served by peer counselors and to determine possible mechanisms by which the intervention may work (contact with peer counselor within 48 hours of delivery, increased points of contact between mother and peer counselor both prenatally and postpartum, and/or improved supervision by lactation consultant). This will be a randomized controlled effectiveness trial of WIC mothers enrolled in four breastfeeding peer counselor programs in three different Connecticut towns. Mothers will be randomly assigned in a 1:1 ratio to either the control arm (breastfeeding peer counselor support program without texting) or the intervention arm (breastfeeding peer counselor support program with texting). Pregnant women will be enrolled between 18-28 weeks gestation when they are referred to the WIC breastfeeding peer counselor program at four WIC sites in Connecticut. Inclusion criteria will include: age >18 years, prenatal intention to breastfeed, having an unlimited text message cell phone plan, 5th grade or greater literacy level, and fluency in English or Spanish. This study will allow us to study the effectiveness of a texting-intervention to improve exclusive breastfeeding rates among WIC mothers. Using technology and digital media to improve communication and coordination among WIC staff and WIC participants in this manner may prove to be an effective model of nutrition education to improve nutrition behavior among WIC participants. If proven effective, the LATCH prototype could have major implications for WIC as it could later be expanded to strengthen other aspects of WIC nutrition education related to pregnancy, infancy and early childhood.

PI: Rafael Perez-Escamilla, PhD
Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health
Director, Office of Public Health Practice
Director, Global Health Concentration
Yale School of Public Health
135 College St. (Suite 200)
New Haven CT