

# Alton Memorial OB Unit Re-Designated 'Baby Friendly'

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ALTON – The Women’s Health and Childbirth Center at Alton Memorial Hospital is always a friendly place for new parents and their babies. And now the department has officially been redesignated as “Baby Friendly.”

Baby-Friendly USA conducted the assessment virtually last fall and this spring to ensure that the practices supporting the tenets of Baby-Friendly have been maintained since the hospital’s initial designation in 2016. Confirmation was received in mid-May.

Baby-Friendly USA is the U.S. authority for the implementation of BFHI, a global program sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The initiative encourages and recognizes hospitals and birthing centers that offer an optimal level of care for breastfeeding mothers and their babies – certainly a noble effort with the recent baby formula shortage.

“Achievement of the Baby-Friendly Designation is not an easy task,” Becky Fallon, accreditation director for Baby-Friendly USA, said in a letter to AMH President Dave Braasch notifying him of the redesignation. “Maintaining compliance with BFHI standards has definite costs, both in human and financial resources, yet the savings in terms of the quality of care provided, the resulting decrease in morbidity and mortality associated with optimal breastfeeding, and customer satisfaction, are well worth the investment.”

Based on the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*, this prestigious international award recognizes birth facilities that offer breastfeeding mothers the information, confidence, and skills needed to successfully initiate and continue breastfeeding their babies.

The aim is to ensure that every family is fully informed of the importance of breastfeeding and receives the help they need to achieve their feeding goals.

“I am so excited to announce the redesignation of this prestigious accomplishment and incredibly proud of the work our staff does every day to provide excellent care, education, and support to our community,” said Renee Strowmatt, nurse clinician at the AMH Women’s Health and Childbirth Center. “Achieving redesignation is important because it means that not only do we think we promote best infant feeding and bonding practices as outlined by Baby-Friendly USA, but a group of independent reviewers has reviewed our practices and has verified that we have continued to meet those stringent standards.”

“The report praised our providers and staff as having demonstrated excellent support of and commitment to the Baby-Friendly practices as evidenced by our care practices and comments from patients. It also stated how well organized and helpful our staff was

during the redesignation process, and how the families were well informed and enthusiastic in sharing their experiences. I spent a great deal of time communicating with our OB providers as we prepared for our assessment, and they were incredibly invested in helping us maintain this designation.”

Jessica Mossman, manager of the Women’s Health and Childbirth Center, said that it took a lot of practice change, shift in culture, and an extensive amount of staff and physician training in breastfeeding, formula feeding and birth practices to achieve the original designation six years ago.

“All of that practice change and education has helped to ensure that mothers have access to staff members who are knowledgeable in all aspects of infant feeding and bonding,” Mossman said. “With the recent nationwide formula shortage, it is great that our staff are trained and have practices in place to help make a mom’s breastfeeding journey successful.”

The focus is on more than breastfeeding, though. Baby-Friendly also includes measures that enhance parent/baby bonding, support families in the safe preparation of infant formula when necessary, and protect mothers against inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes.

“We should applaud the work that our OB team does on a daily basis,” Braasch said. “They keep stacking up these recognitions for excellence in the care and assistance they provide to our moms and families.”

“Our goal is to ensure our staff and physicians are doing all we can to help our families have the best start,” Strowmatt said. “Important to BFHI is that all mothers experience hospital practices that allow for mom and baby to stay together, increase the likelihood that mothers who choose to breastfeed are able to meet their goals, and ensure that mothers who choose to formula feed know how best to safely prepare and feed their babies.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding for at least one year, and the World Health Organization endorses two or more years of breastfeeding for optimum health.”

However, in the instance where a mother cannot or chooses not to breastfeed, the Women’s Health and Childbirth Center continues to provide formula for use during the hospital stay.

There are currently 590 facilities in the United States that have met these criteria, including 29 hospitals in Illinois that have been able to meet the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative criteria.