

# Quintessence Foundation

*Volume #1 - Fall 2000*

## Quintessence News:

**S**urprise! In this our first Quintessence newsletter we are excited to announce our official designation as a non profit foundation. This designation allows us to fundraise to provide support to the Baby-Friendly Initiative. We look forward to big “Baby-Friendly” changes in British Columbia.

The legal process of establishing a not for profit foundation has been a three year voyage- that’s why you may not have heard from Quintessence since our first “Assessing Baby-Friendly” Assessors workshop in March 1998. We are now “up and running” and eager to support breastfeeding issues in British Columbia. Our name is reflective of the position of breastfeeding and human milk in the overall structure of life. The name Quintessence came from the Webster’s dictionary and means “the essence of a thing in its purest and most concentrated form, the most perfect representative of certain things, a thing in the highest and most typical form, the fifth and highest essence.” The ancient Greeks recognized four elements: fire, water, earth and air. We felt the fifth essence in its purest form to be breastfeeding and human milk. Hopefully, the ancient Greeks would agree.

The current focus of the Foundation’s Board of Directors is the Baby-Friendly Initiative in British Columbia. We will continue to work cooperatively with the Baby-Friendly Network. The first project undertaken was our very successful “Assessing Baby-Friendly” assessors workshop. Next, we are cosponsoring a meeting on BFHI for invited representatives from hospitals in the Greater Vancouver area on October 6, 2000. This group of “lead hospitals” will network with other hospitals to facilitate the designation of six (or more) hospitals as “Baby-Friendly” by the end of the year 2001. We look forward to reporting the outcome of this meeting.

We would like to hear from hospitals and communities that are implementing the Baby-Friendly Initiative. The purpose of this newsletter is to share information, resources, challenges and strategies for the future. Let us know about your greatest barriers to achieving “Baby-Friendly” or innovative ways you have overcome barriers. Baby-Friendly communities are our common goal and hospitals striving for the BFHI designation are just part of the bigger picture. We have included a contact slip on the back page so feel free to fill it in or pass it on to interested people. Our plan is to have a contact name in every hospital providing maternity services and every health unit in the province. Currently, we are setting up a web page where our newsletter will be available but in the meantime we are using snail mail.

## Why the “H” in BFHI?

WHO/UNICEF’s Baby-Friendly Initiative (BFHI) specifically targets hospitals in their global effort to return the world to a breastfeeding culture. Why?

Jim Grant, UNICEF’s Executive Director from 1980 to 1995, and who is considered to be the father of the BFHI, was under tremendous pressure to drop the “H” because many felt strongly that the issue of breastfeeding goes beyond the borders of the hospital and into the community at large.

Although he recognized the validity of this argument, Grant insisted that hospitals must be specifically targeted because too many of them - “the sources and symbols of modern medical practice” - hinder breastfeeding through practices such as separating the newborn baby from the mother immediately after birth, and providing (free) infant formula on the highly erroneous belief that it is equivalent to the real thing.

But, as a pragmatist, Grant also saw BFHI as a global effort, involving “hospitals, health services and parents to breastfeed babies for the best start in life.” (UNICEF, *Take the Baby-Friendly Initiative!* pp. 1,3). Perhaps, if he were alive today, he might be tempted to rename the “H” as “Holistic”!

In the end, of course, hospitals live and breathe in the community; and each and every one of us are essential pieces in this enormous puzzle to restore a breastfeeding culture in British Columbia. By working together, we will surely finish the puzzle - and have fun doing it!