

LACTACONNECT: ENHANCING BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT THROUGH TELELACTATION SERVICE INTEGRATION IN HEALTH CARE SETTINGS



Pictured left to right: Dr. Apurv Soni, Dr. Nancy Byatt, Dr. Nisha Fahey and Dr. Martha Zimmermann.

Breastfeeding can provide numerous benefits to both mothers and infants, but it also can be challenging and require additional support. Despite this common occurrence, access to lactation support services is limited, particularly for those with limited socioeconomic resources. Virtual lactation support and education, known as telelactation, is a promising intervention that can enhance access to these services. Using digital health solutions, such as telelactation, requires thoughtful implementation into the clinical workflow to improve outcomes, support providers and reduce inequities.

The interdepartmental team of Nisha Fahey, DO, MS, Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatrics; Kristen Matteson, MD, MPH, Professor and Vice Chair, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology; Apurv Soni, MD, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine; Martha Zimmermann, PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychiatry; Eric Alper, MD, Chief Quality Officer and Chief Medical Informatics Officer, UMass

Memorial Health; Nancy Byatt, DO, MS, MBA, Professor, Department of Psychiatry; Tiffany Moore Simas, MD, MPH, MEd, Professor and Chair, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology; and Adrian Zai, MD, PhD, Associate Professor and Chief Research Informatics Officer, Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences and the Center for Clinical and Translational Science; is conducting a pilot study with SimpliFed, a telelactation company, to demonstrate the feasibility of telelactation and its impact on maternal and infant health through an intervention-only design.

With additional funding, the LactaConnect team plans to extend the scope of their pilot study to understand the deployment of SimpliFed, using an approach for achieving interoperability between SimpliFed and the electronic medical record (EMR) application programming interface. This integration into the EMR will allow for closed-loop communication between providers and SimpliFed leading to enhanced patient care. Additionally, the research team will contrive a control group using EMR data-mining methods previously established by the team to evaluate patient and provider outcomes.

“We intend to increase access to culturally responsive baby-feeding support to empower mothers to achieve their baby-feeding goals. Previous research by members of our group has shown that when the expectations of a mother for feeding her baby do not align with actual experience, it can negatively impact maternal health as well as have downstream effects on newborns,” explained Dr. Fahey. “This mismatch in expectations and reality is common and resources to overcome it are not widely accessible, especially to families with socioeconomic disadvantages. Our goal is to reduce inequities in access to baby-feeding resources and support for families during this critical time period, which can have major, positive short- and long-term impacts.” She continued, “Our project increases access to culturally responsive baby-feeding support through telelactation services, which has positive impacts on maternal mental health, mother-infant bonding, and child growth and development.”



The team intends to expand their work throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and pursue funding opportunities for digital health technologies focused on maternal and child health. And, while their notable, honorable mention designation does not elicit funding through the Prize for Academic Collaboration and Excellence (PACE), they appreciate the benefits this program provides. “The PACE program fosters collaboration across departments and disciplines with an emphasis on supporting the next generation of clinical researchers at our organization,” shared Dr. Fahey. “It creates the opportunity for researchers to propose novel ideas with an interdisciplinary team and sets the stage for future external funding, continued collaboration, and even more impact on the lives of patients.”

