

The Role of the Father in Breastfeeding - Jarold Tom Johnston, BSN, MSN, CNM, IBCLC, currently serving on active duty as a Major in the U.S. Army Medical Corp.

Tom Johnston explored the history of paternal involvement in childbirth education and labor support with the intention of examining how this transfers to the value of dad in the breastfeeding relationship. Tom advocated for recognition of dads as equal partners in breastfeeding and parenting relationships. Effective teaching strategies were identified that would prepare dads for their role as "breastfeeding coaches". Dads were provided with basic knowledge about how breastfeeding works, information which Tom explained was essential to their function in the role of active participant. Fathers were taught during the pregnancies of their partners specifically how to provide this support in order to become equal partners with the mothers of their babies in learning information that would equip them for success with breastfeeding. These fathers were taught how to look for milk transfer, the basics of positioning and latch, how exactly to be supportive (what nursing moms need from their men) and the best ways to interact and connect with their babies. Such innovative ideas as having two chairs in each exam room and teaching a little bit about breastfeeding at each prenatal appointment really aren't new suggestions but when combined with an examination of the differences in men's learning styles coupled with the illustration of the military man's understanding of how to maintain and use the M-16 rifle, utilizing this as a comparison with the "mechanics" of breastfeeding and the needs of the newborn, the audience came away from Tom's presentation with a renewed sense of the value of dads.

Marcia Barritt