

Introducing the speech therapist in the Neonatology Unit: an innovative way to support breastfeeding in healthy newborns even during COVID-19 pandemic

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DOI: 10.36129/jog.2022.S114

Objective. The aim of the study was to intercept early problems and difficulties in onset and stabilization phases of breastfeeding, in a population of healthy full-term newborns - during the COVID-19 pandemic - through a Clinical Governance Project, supported by the Department of Neonatology and Pediatrics, which introduced a speech therapist, as part of the professional team acting synergistically with neonatologists, pediatricians, pediatric nurses, midwives and gynecologists.

Materials and Methods. Over a period of two months (2020), n = 72 newborns, 38 males and 34 females, were recruited (mean age: 1.3 days) in the Departments of Neonatology and Obstetrics and Gynecology of Castelli Hospital, ASLRM6. Lingual frenulum neonatal screening (Martinelli, 2015) was administered to all the newborns and the frenulum was classified as normal, doubtful or impaired. Breastfeeding difficulties were evaluated and speech therapist

counseling was performed, to support early onset and stabilization of breastfeeding.

Results. Lingual frenulum screening resulted normal in 36 (50%), doubtful in 20 (28%) and impaired in 16 (22%) of total newborns. An alteration of both lingual and upper labial frenulum was found in 16 (22%) of the newborns studied. n = 23 newborns (32%) showed alterations able to hinder breastfeeding: these cases were successfully managed by helping the mothers to change the breastfeeding position, adopting a "rugby hold" position.

Conclusions. According to our preliminary results, speech therapist counselling, in the critical COVID-19 pandemic, allowed early detection of lingual frenulum alterations, and their impact on the onset of breastfeeding. We found that altered lingual frenulum was associated with breastfeeding difficulties: in these patients, speech therapist intervention resulted useful in managing early breastfeeding problems.