

Engaging and meeting the online information needs of potential milk bank donors

Dr Mel Hyde and Professor Barbara Masser
School of Psychology, The University of Queensland

Overview

Milk bank websites are a first point-of-contact and an essential source of information for potential and actual donors of human breast milk. Although they are a critical health resource, milk banks are often resource constrained and staff may not always have the capacity to respond quickly to the many initial queries that come from mothers in the community.

Many mothers contact milk banks because they want to be involved and are passionate about this possibility. Mothers commonly have questions about whether they can donate, and if not, why not, where the milk bank is located and how milk collection or drop-off works. An effective website enables a milk bank to manage donor and community information needs and expectations as well as minimise time invested by staff in basic eligibility screening.

Scoping review of milk bank websites

In order to provide recommendations as to the essential information to provide to donors in order to enhance existing milk bank websites or inform newly created websites, we undertook a scoping review of milk bank websites. Websites were reviewed if they were available in, or easily translated to, English and included specific information for potential or current donors of human breast milk. For profit, peer-to-peer and informal human milk sharing sites were not included in the review. The review was conducted between 21st and 26th June, 2019.

Thirty-two non-profit human milk bank websites were identified with websites sourced from national associations (Human Milk Banking Association of North America, United Kingdom Association of Milk Banks, European Milk Bank Association) and individual hospital or community milk banks. Locations included Australia (6), New Zealand (1), United States (10), Canada (4), Brazil (1), Spain (1), France (1), Italy (1), Netherlands (1), Sweden (1), England (4), and Scotland (1).

Recommended information for donors on milk bank websites

Milk bank websites should provide sufficiently detailed, up-to-date information about safety, eligibility, and engagement with the service. This information will enable potential donors to self-select in or out of registering their interest to donate, and to choose alternative ways to support the milk bank if they are unable to donate. Seven key recommendations are provided below.

Recommendation 1 – Provide general information about human milk donation

- Provide information about pasteurised donor human milk: what it is, how it is created, who needs it, and who has access to it (e.g., a video ‘tour’ of the milk bank or pasteurisation process).

Recommendation 2 – Include specific information about the milk bank

- Include an ‘About us’ page that has information about the milk bank such as year founded, safety record, and links to established organisations or an overarching service to enhance credibility.
- Present statistics that show how many mothers have donated (or how many Litres have been collected) and how many babies have been helped (or how many Litres have been given).

Recommendation 3 – Provide clear and specific donor eligibility criteria

- Ensure that specific, detailed information on the current eligibility criteria is provided as well as a having a frequently asked questions section or a downloadable information sheet.
- Depending on donor eligibility criteria, include information about the following aspects and ensure information is detailed (e.g., amounts, frequency, date ranges, age etc.):
 - Lifestyle factors, medical conditions and medication that make potential donors ineligible or defer donors permanently or temporarily from donating.
 - Minimum volume requirement for stored or expressed milk and expiry timeframe.
 - Distance from the service in which mothers are eligible to donate (e.g., specific range of kilometres from the service or a specific area or location). An interactive tool may be useful such as a map with a service locator or postcode entry function.
 - Collection or delivery method (e.g., state if in-person collection by staff is required, or if mothers need to deliver to the service and explain why this method is used).
- Clearly state that donation is possible only when mothers have excess milk beyond their own baby's needs.

Recommendation 4 – Explain in detail how donation works

- Include a 'How donation works' page/section in which the steps (e.g., screening, testing, collection) and time taken in donating are described or shown visually in detail.
- Give potential donors a realistic preview of the donation process and the impact it may have on them if they choose to regularly donate or not. Personal stories or testimonials are useful.
- Inform donors about hygiene and storage requirements to ensure safety of the milk supplied.

Recommendation 5 – Help donors to feel good about who their milk benefits

- Although it should be clear that donors will not know the individual recipients of their milk, it is important to give the facts about who generally receives donor milk and feature recipients by using images of parents and babies, testimonials and stories in written or video format.

Recommendation 6 – Make it easy to discover how to become a donor or contact the milk bank

- Ask potential donors to complete an online eligibility quiz prior to giving the option to register.
- Ask questions on the registration form that are consistent with the donor eligibility criteria. Collect name, contact details and location of potential donors, age of their baby, volume of milk available, how they found out about the milk bank (including referral), and agreement to terms.
- Give clear information about the response times that potential donors who register their interest can expect, and indicate whether this response will be via email, text, or phone.
- Include prominent contact information including a phone number for the milk bank if possible.

Recommendation 7 – Provide more than one option to support the milk bank

- Create a 'Support' page detailing options other than donation to support the milk bank.
- Options may include creating a Facebook page that supporters can engage with and share; a mailing list that supporters can join to receive a quarterly newsletter; or fundraising (e.g., choosing the milk bank as a designated charity, purchasing milk bank-related equipment).