

## What do you know about Baby Milk Action?

Baby Milk Action is a UK-based non-profit organization that aims to save lives and end the avoidable suffering caused by inappropriate infant feeding. It works within a global network to strengthen independent, transparent and effective controls on the marketing of the baby feeding industry. The global network is called the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and this involves over 200 citizens groups in more than 100 countries.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1.5 million infants die around the world every year because they are not breast-fed. Where water is unsafe, a bottle-fed child is up to 25 times more likely to die as a result of diarrhoea than a breast-fed child. A code was introduced in 1981 to regulate the marketing of breast-milk substitutes; however, many companies continue to violate its provisions.

Have I caught your interest? Perhaps you're wondering why I'm writing about this in the ACPWH Journal? Well, once upon a time (circa 1996), a motion was passed at the Annual Representatives' Conference (ARC) that called upon the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy to support the Baby Milk Action campaign. I hadn't heard of the organization until then, but the debate inspired me to find out more. As a physiotherapist, I feel that we should be aware of the wider implications of the political and social issues relating to health, and as a women's health physiotherapist, this has to include issues relating to the health of women and their children. In my previous role as a Council member, I've presented the introduction to the 'Social Issues' section at ARC on several occasions. This section often sees some of the fiercest debates!

Many ACPWH members who know me personally also know that I signed up to the Nestlé

boycott, part of the Baby Milk Action campaign, in 1996. Some other Association members have also signed up to the boycott, while others refuse to buy products marketed under the Nescafé coffee label. Nestlé is targeted specifically because monitoring conducted by IBFAN has found it to be responsible for more violations of the World Health Assembly marketing requirements for baby foods than any other company.

On an academic level, the marketing code has been covered in the medical press. The *British Medical Journal*, in particular, has published several articles, such as Taylor (1998). The online version of this study (URL <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/316/7138/1117>) features the full text of the paper, as well as a section of related articles and other information.

If you would like to know more about the campaign, the following websites will be of interest to you: <[www.ibfan.org](http://www.ibfan.org)> and <[www.babymilkaction.org](http://www.babymilkaction.org)>.

**Teresa Cook**

*Honorary visiting lecturer  
University of Bradford*

*Bradford*

*ACPWH workshop tutor*

*Formerly team leader of*

*women's health physiotherapy*

*James Paget University Hospitals*

*NHS Foundation Trust*

*Norfolk*

*E-mail: [tcook1@bradford.ac.uk](mailto:tcook1@bradford.ac.uk)*

### Reference

Taylor A. (1998) Violations of the international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes: prevalence in four countries. *British Medical Journal* 316 (7154), 1117–1122.