

00247 Milk Banking and Islam – The Singapore Experience

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Aims: Background: In Islam, consuming breast milk from a woman other than the biological mother establishes kinship. This impacts potential relationships as the recipient and donor's children are regarded as siblings and cannot marry one another. Whilst planning for Singapore's first human milk bank, the KK Human Milk Bank (KKHMB), it was felt that this could be an obstacle in providing Pasteurized Donor Human Milk (PDHM) to Muslim preterm infants in Singapore.

Aim: To seek guidance for PDHM use in Muslim preterm infants from The Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, MUIS), such that it is acceptable in Islam.

Methodology: MUIS was engaged early in the preparatory phase for the KKHMB. Published literature on benefits of PDHM versus formula in preterm infants and views of religious experts from Western countries were shared. MUIS issued a FATWA noting that PDHM has medicinal value as it helps the digestive system develop and prevents serious illness. The establishment of the milk bank is in line with the objective of Shari'ah (Muslim Law) which emphasizes the need for the preservation of human life. Consuming PDHM does not meet the requirements for kinship because of doubt about the donors' identity and amount of milk required for the infant to feel full. The FATWA was available at the MUIS' website at the time of the KKHMB launch. Media was engaged to create public awareness.

Result: The KKHMB started operations in August 2017. Of the 305 donors recruited, 4% are Muslim donors. 28% of the 291 recipients are Muslim infants. They consumed 35% of the 948 liters of PDHM dispensed.

Conclusion: Collaboration with the relevant religious authorities avoided conflict between religious beliefs and clinical practice. Milk banking is well accepted amongst Singapore's Muslim community. Thus vulnerable preterm Muslim infants are not deprived of this precious resource.