

Fonterra studies breast milk components to make similar child nutrition products

22 October 2013 | Influencers | By BioSpectrum Bureau



New Zealand biggest dairy firm, Fonterra, recently collaborated with International Osteoporosis Foundation (IOF) to fund and support research on female bone health in Indonesia. Fonterra is one of the largest investors in dairy based research in early stage nutrition for formula fed infants. Fonterra is doing research on metabolomics to help understand the differences in formula fed infants as compared to breast fed infants and studying the individual components of breast milk to develop ingredients that aim to achieve similar efficacy to breast milk.

In an interview with BioSpectrum Asia, Professor Geoff Cleghorn, chairman, advisory board, Anmum; professor, paediatrics and deputy head, medicine, University of Queensland; and director international, school of medicine, University of Queensland and Ms Donna Le Quesne, general manager, innovations, Asia / Middle East, Fonterra, New Zealand, talk about activities in Fonterra related to maternal and infant healthcare research.

What are the key trends in Asia related to infant health and nutrition and how is Fonterra positioned to address them?

Professor Cleghorn: With over 30 million babies born in China alone each year, Fonterra's key focus areas is maternal and paediatric nutrition. Additionally, in a region that is becoming increasingly more affluent, consumers are now at a stage where they are able to consider more targeted nutrition for their children, making maternal and paediatric nutrition one of the fastest growing categories in the world.

What are the initiatives undertaken by Fonterra in Asia related to infant health?

Ms Le Quesne: Understanding the needs of mother and their families in Asia has been a focus for Fonterra in Asia and is the

main driver behind our Annum brand. Since the brand's inception, we have been focused on R&D to support the health and wellness needs of mothers and their young children in Asia.

Fonterra established Annum advisory board in 2007, consisting of internationally respected medical opinion leaders in the area of foetal, infant and child health. The board consists of eight independent researchers and clinicians in child and maternal nutrition and health from six countries and two Fonterra nutrition experts.

With a shared goal of improving knowledge on maternal, infant and child nutrition and development, the board assists local doctors and nurses across Asia to keep up with the latest scientific discoveries in the area of child development.

What are the current ongoing clinical studies in Asia?

Ms Le Quesne: Globally, Fonterra spends \$50 million annually on scientific research, an investment that includes ongoing research into nutrition, maternal and infant health, and child development.

Our research programme has specifically focused on the needs of Asian populations to guide the development of high quality products and to support the health and wellness needs of families in the region.

Fonterra has had a strong focus on maternal and paediatric health, and it was this focus that drove the development of our Annum brand.

Dietary folic acid is well known for its pivotal role in preventing the birth defect of spina bifida. At the time when little was known about folate status in Asian women Annum began a research programme to quantify the problem of folate inadequacy in Asia. The results revealed that four-out-of-five women were at risk of folate inadequacy.

Annum Materna provides the recommended level of folic acid and clinical study has shown that it can significantly increase folate status in females to levels known to confer the lowest risk of neural tube defects. We are continuing our research into this important area and currently have further studies on the importance of folate underway.

Following that, we supported the undertaking of an infant clinical study which showed that Annum IFFO containing complex milk lipids, a rich source of Gangliosides, improved several measures of cognitive development and overall development score by six months of age.

Most recently published were the findings from a clinical study which documented gut development and developmental progress of infants consuming Annum IFFO improved formulation with probiotic DR10. This showed very positive results, which support the inclusion of DR10 probiotic to our infant formula products. It is through such clinical researches that we are able to really build a trusted position with mothers and those who influence their decision making.

Does Fonterra have any partnership with local institutes and industry to enhance the research?

Professor Cleghorn: The Annum advisory board is committed to working collaboratively with local partners to educate the region on proper maternal and infant nutrition. The Annum advisory board is a testament to this partnership approach. With eight internationally respected nutritional and medical opinion leaders in the area of foetal, infant and child health, allow us to work closely with leading medical professionals across the region.