

DONOR MILK BANK INITIATIVE FOUNDED IN GERMANY

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Only around two dozen out of a total of over 200 perinatal centres in Germany can feed their premature patients with milk from donor milk banks. Mother's milk gives premature infants and sick newborns an optimal start in life, but when they cannot have their own mother's milk, a donor milk bank can save lives. The recently established Donor Milk Bank Initiative (FMBI, after the German acronym) calls on politicians, authorities, health insurance companies and hospitals in Germany to ensure that all patients in need are able to benefit from safe donor milk.

"It is scientifically proven that mother's milk or milk from donor milk banks protects premature infants from severe and sometimes fatal enterocolitis. Human milk contains immunoactive factors that are perfectly adapted to the needs of the newborn and which provide unique protection for the gut flora. Apart from that, there is evidence that human milk has a positive impact on brain development", explained Prof. Dr. Christoph Fusch, FMBI board member and Medical Director of the University Children's Hospital, Nuremberg, Germany.

Across Germany the demand for donor milk is significantly higher than what donor milk banks are able to offer. In Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland and Schleswig-Holstein there is not a single donor milk bank. Lower Saxony made an important advance when its Parliament decided in December 2016 to provide financial support to set up donor milk banks.

"As a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Germany committed itself to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. FMBI calls on politicians, authorities and health insurance companies to fulfil their responsibility and support the establishment of donor milk banks", said Anne Sunder-Plassmann, human rights expert and FMBI founding member.

FMBI has been founded by several directors and staff of donor milk banks, neonatologists, paediatricians, nurses, lactation experts and academics from all over Germany.

"Our goal is that in five years no federal state in Germany will be without a donor milk bank and in the future all premature infants and sick newborns in need will be fed with milk from donor milk banks", stated Dr. Corinna Gebauer, board member of FMBI and the European Milk Bank Association as well as Medical Director of the donor milk bank at the University Hospital in Leipzig.

The strategy of FMBI is to raise public awareness about the advantages of mother's and donor milk, enhance academic discourse and sharing of expertise, and to work hand-in-hand with interested hospitals. By advocating for its goals with politicians, authorities and health insurance companies FMBI will overcome financial and administrative hurdles that currently prevent many hospitals in Germany from setting up donor milk banks. FMBI closely cooperates

with national and international medical associations and other organizations, institutions and experts.

“We welcome everyone who shares FMBI’s goals and wants to support the initiative as a new member, fellow campaigner or funder. Together we can ensure the best development of the smallest patients”, said Judith Karger-Seider, FMBI board member and neonatal intensive care nurse at the University Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf.

Background information:

There is a worldwide trend toward the development of more donor milk banks. There are now over 500 milk banks worldwide, more than 220 of them in Europe. In many developing and newly industrializing countries donor milk banks are an important tool in the fight against infant mortality. Many developed countries also increasingly embrace donor milk banks in order to facilitate a good start for extremely premature infants, most of whom survive today thanks to improved neonatal intensive care.

In Germany most donor milk banks are in the eastern federal states because they were able to build on a long institutional tradition. In the past six years seven donor milk banks have been set up in the western federal states. The first donor milk collection in Germany was set up in May 1919 by the paediatrician Marie-Elise Kayser in Magdeburg.

Health insurance companies do not cover the costs of processing donor milk and hospitals usually have to shoulder all the costs.

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