CAMPUS NEWS

Lactation rooms offer safe, clean space for mothers

The lactation room in the Saucier Wellness Center can be accessed upon request at the information desk. The room has a gliding rocking chair and educational information about breast-feeding provided by the March of Dimes.

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Three lactation rooms for nursing mothers have been established on the University of Louisiana at Lafayette campus due to the efforts of a doctoral student in the nursing department.

LeShawn Alexander, a UL Lafayette doctoral student, used the lactation rooms as her doctoral project. She said she has always had a love for breast-feeding, and did extensive research about its benefits while earning her master's degree.

Alexander said during her research for this project, she found many women were weaning their children early so they could go back to work or school. She said she thinks having the lactation rooms on campus will encourage more women to continue breast-feeding when they return to school after having a child.

"We're not here to tell people to make one decision over the other; we're here to give people the choice," Alexander said.

Assisting Alexander in this project was Helen Hurst, Ph.D., graduate coordinator and assistant professor in the College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions. Hurst said before the lactation rooms, some of her students would ask if they could pump their breast milk in her office. She said she then began to wonder where students pumped when there was no office for them to use.

"People need a clean, quiet area to pump. The last thing you want is someone pumping in a bathroom," Hurst said.

There are three rooms on campus: one in the Saucier Wellness Center, one in the Student Union and one in Bourgeois Hall. Each of the rooms has a cushioned rocking chair, informational material from the March of Dimes and an extra breast pump, in case someone forgets to bring his or her own. The rooms lock from the inside to provide security for whomever is using it.

"I've actually been a little shocked because ... it seems as though as soon as people found out about it ... they started coming immediately," Alexander said.

She said there have been at least five people each week using the room in health services, but they have not been able to track the other rooms yet.

The lactation rooms opened in the beginning of December, but Hurst said she doesn't expect to see large numbers. She said the rooms should not be about providing services to lots of people, but to people who need it.

"If two or three people use it every week or every couple of weeks, then we feel like we provided a service," Hurst said.

Along with the rooms, Alexander wrote a lactation accommodation policy for the university. It includes responsibilities of the university - milk expression breaks for faculty and staff, a place to express milk and education support - and responsibilities of nursing mothers, which include providing their own breast pump, bringing their own storage containers and leaving the room clean for other women.

If the demand for the lactation rooms continues to grow, both Hurst and Alexander said they would like to put more rooms in other buildings. Hurst said she would like to have "ease of accessibility" with the rooms so a woman would not have to go far to find one. She said she would like to try to get a room in one of the buildings on the far side of Rex Street near Lewis Street.

"I think it would be very nice to expand. I would be up for the challenge," Alexander said.

To use the rooms, a woman must go to the information desk at the location and request the lactation room. She must give the person on duty her ID - school ID or any other form of identification - and sign in to the room in a log book. When she is done with the room, she must sign out at the desk and have her ID returned to them.

The lactation rooms were financed by the March of Dimes 2015 Community Award Grant. This grant funds efforts to advocate for infant health and decrease infant mortality, according to the March of Dimes website.