

Maureen Minchin



Maureen Minchin's 1982 book, *Food for Thought: a Parent's Guide to Food Intolerance*, was the start of a long career in breastfeeding advocacy, although *Breastfeeding Matters: what we need to know about infant feeding* was the book that brought her to world attention and created change. She was active in NMAA from the 1970s, and helped create both ILCA and IBLCE, ensuring that WHO code compliance was enshrined in their founding principles. From the 1980s on she was involved with health professional education on all aspects of infant feeding, in Australia and overseas, working with WHO Geneva and UNICEF New York on a variety of issues, including BFHI (which included assessing pilot hospitals in Nigeria, and teaching in Pakistan Malaysia and Hong Kong.) An early IBFANer, founder of ALCA in 1987, and ILCA Board member 1989-1991, she was active in the first Nestle Boycott, and later worked with World Vision to create a coalition that pressured the Australian government to act on Code issues. In every arena, national and international, she witnessed politics and self-interest undermining the cohesion needed for effective action to help mothers and babies. She has experienced threats, bullying and shunning by extremists from a variety of backgrounds, some avowed breastfeeding advocates with little apparent awareness of their own vested interests. Despite the unpleasantness created by those who set themselves up as moral judges of others' actions, she has persevered in her efforts to tell truth without fear of favour, and to ensure that research is translated into clinical practice in ways that help women and their children breastfeed. An historian not a scientist, she is a member of the International Society for Research in Human Milk and Lactation (ISRHML). A full biography can be found in her book, *Milk Matters: infant feeding and immune disorder*, which can be downloaded free at <https://infantfeedingmatters.com/>

Presentation Title - Experts and ethics: controversies and cults.

Maureen will discuss how dissension within breastfeeding advocacy groups about ethical and sociopolitical issues has been constant. The varying makeup of the advocacy community, can make it difficult or confusing for lactation consultants to develop an appropriate stance on some key questions, such as interaction with industry-linked scientists and conflict of interests. One stream of thought claiming the moral high ground calls for total avoidance, even shunning or de-platforming of speakers known to have any industry connections, past or present. Others take a more pragmatic approach to keeping up with infant feeding science, where research is still substantially funded by interests within the scope of the International Code of Marketing of BMS. There are consequences to both approaches. Consideration of consequences can guide responsible individual decision-making. This presentation calls for an end to all cult-like behaviours by health professionals. It seeks to create a framework for individual decision making, acknowledging the constraints of earning a living from what is much more than a full-time job. It discusses some of these issues via a cost-benefit analysis, respectful both of every individual's moral agency, and of the need not to undermine or alienate scientists and other fellow advocates of maternal breastfeeding as optimal (both for maternal health and for infant health and development). Audience input is expected and welcomed.