

Flange Fit in the Real World: A NICU Clinician's Perspective on Pumping Research

Journal of Human Lactation

© The Author(s) 2025

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/08903344251367071

journals.sagepub.com/home/jhl



Dear Editor,

As a practicing International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) with nearly 2 decades of experience supporting high-risk perinatal populations—including exclusively pumping parents of medically fragile infants in neonatal intensive care units (NICUs)—I am writing in response to the recently published article by Anders et al. (2024), "Flange Size Matters: A Comparative Pilot Study of the Flange FITSTM Guide Versus Traditional Sizing Methods."

The authors present compelling evidence that smaller flange sizes may increase comfort and milk output, yet their study population does not reflect the complex realities of NICU families who rely entirely on mechanical milk expression. Most participants were not exclusively pumping and averaged only three pumping sessions per day. In contrast, NICU parents routinely pump eight or more times daily for weeks or months, under immense physical and emotional stress. The study's findings, while promising, cannot yet be generalized to this high-risk group.

Additionally, the absence of standardized pump equipment introduces confounding variables. Differences in suction strength, cycle patterns, and flange compatibility among various brands can significantly impact both comfort and yield (Felice et al., 2017; Leiter et al., 2022). Without controlling for these factors, it is difficult to isolate flange size as the primary outcome determinant.

Furthermore, the proliferation of flange brands—now exceeding 100—raises concerns about the commercialization of flange sizing. Despite longstanding success using four core flange sizes in clinical practice, many of these products are marketed with minimal clinical validation. In my experience, individualized fitting using those traditional tools has been effective for most NICU parents. While select cases may benefit from angled flanges or soft silicone inserts, these choices should be based on anatomical variation—not market trends.

It is also important to note that smaller flanges often perform better after milk supply is established and breasts are less engorged. Introducing too many product options to new NICU parents during the early postpartum period, when they are already overwhelmed and under stress is not consistent with good patient care. Recommending one type of flange early on, only to suggest another purchase shortly thereafter, often leads to confusion and increased stress. In my experience, patients feel unsupported and uncertain when faced with frequent changes in equipment advice. As clinicians, we must practice

individualized care while not burdening families with unnecessary product purchases. By frequently changing our recommendations, we inadvertently support commercial interests and enable a market that profits from our indecision.

Future studies should focus specifically on exclusively pumping participants, utilize a standardized pump model, and evaluate long-term outcomes such as sustained comfort, nipple trauma, and milk supply stability. These enhancements are critical to generating clinically relevant evidence that supports equitable, patient-centered care.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this important topic and contribute to the ongoing dialogue in our field.

Sincerely,

Mina Ognjanovic-Jasovic, MHA, IBCLC 

UCLA Health, Providence Cedars-Sinai Tarzana Medical Center, Balboa Pediatrics, Los Angeles, CA, USA
mina@minalactation.com

Acknowledgments

The author extends gratitude to the patients, families, and health-care teams who continue to inspire efforts to improve maternal and neonatal care.

ORCID iD

Mina Ognjanovic-Jasovic  <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0380-8733>

Author Contributions

Mina Ognjanovic-Jasovic: Conceptualization; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

References

- Anders, L. A., Mesite Frem, J., & McCoy, T. P. (2024). Flange size matters: A comparative pilot study of the Flange FITSTM guide versus traditional sizing methods. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 41(1), 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344241296036>
- Felice, J. P., Geraghty, S. R., Quagliari, C. W., Yamada, R., Wong, A. J., & Rasmussen, K. M. (2017). 'Breastfeeding' without baby: A longitudinal, qualitative investigation of how mothers perceive, feel about, and practice human milk expression. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 13(3), Article e12426.
- Leiter, V., Agiliga, A., Kennedy, E., & Mecham, E. (2022). Pay at the pump? Problems with electric breast pumps. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, Article 114625. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114625>