



# IBLCE®

*International Board of  
Lactation Consultant Examiners*

## **Advisory Opinion:**

### **Assessment, Diagnosis, and Referral**

#### Background

IBLCE® has received several inquiries regarding the diagnosis of disease and disease processes including, among others, "tongue tie," thrush, and mastitis. As is a common practice of certification boards on matters of significance, IBLCE is issuing an Advisory Opinion on this matter. This Advisory Opinion is meant to provide guidance to the IBCLC® on professional practice as it relates to diagnosing these conditions.

#### IBCLC Practice Guiding Documents

##### *Scope of Practice for International Board Certified Lactation Consultant® (IBCLC) Certificants*

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants must act within the confines of the *Scope of Practice for IBCLCs*. The *Scope of Practice for IBCLCs* defines the activities in which IBCLC certificants can engage based upon their education and the authority granted to certificants by the organization having jurisdiction over their certification. The purpose of acting within the *Scope of Practice for IBCLCs* is to protect the public by assuring that all IBCLC certificants provide safe, competent and evidence-based care. The *Scope of Practice for IBCLCs* is applicable in any country or setting where IBCLC certificants practice.

The following tenets from the *Scope of Practice for IBCLCs* pertain to this Advisory Opinion:

IBCLC certificants have the duty to provide competent services for mothers and families by:

- performing comprehensive maternal, child and feeding assessments related to lactation; and
- providing evidence-based information regarding complementary therapies during lactation and their impact on a mother's milk production and the effect on her child.

IBCLC certificants have the duty to report truthfully and fully to the mother and/or infant's primary health care provider and to the health care system by:

- recording all relevant information concerning care provided and, where appropriate, retaining records for the time specified by the local jurisdiction.

IBCLC certificants have the duty to act with reasonable diligence by:

- making necessary referrals to other health care providers and community support resources when necessary.

See also the [\*Clinical Competencies for the Practice of International Board Certified Lactation Consultants \(IBCLCs\)\*](#) for additional guidance.

### Definitions

**Practicing medicine** means to engage, with or without compensation, in medical diagnosis, healing, treatment or surgery.

A **medical diagnosis** is based upon a medical history and physical examination and may include additional testing which then leads to identifying a disease or disease process.

**Treatment** may include medical, surgical or psychiatric management of a patient.

## Advisory Opinion

**The above statements from the IBCLC Practice Guiding Documents outline the IBCLC's process of assessment, documentation, and referral. The IBCLC certificant neither practices medicine nor diagnoses a disease or disease process unless the certificant is separately licensed or authorised to perform such procedures. An IBCLC certificant does: carefully assess, document findings, and refer appropriately as needed, to obtain a medical diagnosis and possible treatment.**

An addendum to this Advisory Opinion is set forth below which provides case scenarios to further illustrate these concepts as it applies to a disease or disease process.

## Advisory Opinion Addendum

**The following examples provide suggested wording that will vary according to practice setting and cultural context. Please extrapolate to other topics as they arise. IBCLCs who are also licensed healthcare professionals must adhere to their scope of practice and these suggestions may not apply. IBCLCs must also respect their employer's policies and referral guidelines when giving information and support.**

**These examples are only a small part of the larger conversation that will ideally take place with a family.**

**To encourage collaboration and minimise miscommunication, a best practice is to provide the parent(s) with a written copy of your observations when making a referral to another healthcare provider.**

### Example 1

“Your baby has white patches in his mouth that do not rub off. This, along with the symptoms you described of burning pain after feeds, as well as the appearance of the skin on your nipples, indicates that you may have a yeast infection. I am going to ask you to talk to your primary healthcare provider for further evaluation. Here is a handout with some strategies that some mothers find helpful. [These suggestions would ideally be from reliable evidence-based sources that have culturally appropriate and attainable materials/customs]. Here is a written referral form that you may share with your primary healthcare provider that describes the symptoms I observed.”

### Example 2

“If you have a fever, your breast has red streaks, and you feel body aches as if you are coming down with the flu, you may have mastitis. Only a primary healthcare provider can say for sure if mastitis is the cause of these symptoms, or if you require medication. It is important that you talk with your primary healthcare provider about your symptoms. Here is a list of suggestions for managing your discomfort while you wait to see your

provider.”

### Example 3

“After evaluating your baby's mouth and tongue movements during breastfeeding, it would appear your baby has a hard time making appropriate tongue movements to adequately drain your breast. It is possible that the slow weight gain, as well as your continued nipple pain, despite working on better positioning and latch, could be due to restricted tongue movements. In some babies, this is due to a short frenulum, or ‘tongue tie’. Here is a list of healthcare providers that are skilled at identifying tongue tie and treating this condition. If a provider is not covered by your health plan, there may be costs involved if you choose to see them. If you are unable to access this type of care at this time, or choose to do nothing, I can assist you by making a plan to support your goals. Here is a copy of the evaluation that was performed during our time together. You may share this with any healthcare providers you choose to see.”

### Example 4

“I understand that you've found some information on the internet about food/herbs reported to increase milk supply. Some breastfeeding mothers report that they have successfully increased their milk supply with foods/herbs. I encourage you to speak with your primary healthcare provider, and the baby's primary healthcare provider, before starting any new foods/herbs to make sure there are no contraindications for the ingredients that you plan to take. I will be happy to evaluate your baby's feeding to assess if there is a problem, and help you develop some strategies to address your concerns.”