



Education and Support for NICU Caregivers

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Dear NICU Director,

We believe that strengthening the parent-baby bond and family functioning in the NICU is the “next big frontier” in improving infant outcomes, and that supporting NICU parents is equally important to providing medical care to their baby.

“Caring for Babies and their Families: Providing Psychosocial Support in the NICU” will enable your NICU staff to bring care of the NICU baby and family to the next level.

It is well known that most education in nursing school, medical school, and other allied health professions focuses intently on familiarizing the learner with the pathophysiology of the disease processes affecting different patient populations and techniques of critical care to manage them, and much less so on providing psychosocial support to the patients and their families. As research delves further into the importance of supporting the parent-baby connection and its relationship to both the NICU baby’s developmental outcome and the parents’ emotional functioning, this course focuses on providing information, tools, and tips to help staff do just that. A key principle woven throughout the course is that NICU staff need to be emotionally supported as well, so that they will have the emotional capacity to support the parents in their care.

What is the NICU Staff Education Course “Caring for Babies and their Families”?

The NICU Staff Education Course, “Caring for Babies and their Families: Providing Psychosocial Support in the NICU,” has been created by professionals with input from more than 100 NICU parents. The content is:

- **Representative of Potentially Better Practices**, and is based on the “Interdisciplinary Recommendations for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents” published in December, 2015 in *Journal of Perinatology*.
 - The National Perinatal Association, in association with a large working group of representatives from a wide range of professional and parent support organizations, derived recommendations in six different topic areas, to give NICU staff the tools needed at the bedside to empower parents and minimize their emotional distress during their baby’s NICU stay.
 - The “Recommendations” pull together and endorse a number of standards developed by professional organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of Neonatal Nurses, and the National Association of Perinatal Social Workers.
 - 33 professional and parent support organizations have reviewed these “Recommendations” and indicated their support.
- **Clinically relevant**, with many suggestions for techniques NICU staff can use at the bedside to enhance their interaction with and support of NICU parents.

- **Engaging and story-driven**, and includes quotes, audio and video clips from graduate NICU parents so that NICU staff will hear firsthand about the needs of NICU parents and be able to experience the NICU “in their shoes.”
- **Resource-rich**, and includes a great variety of downloadable handouts for use in the NICU, including extensive bibliographies on each topic covered, examples of order sets for palliative care, guidelines for how to run a Debrief Session after a difficult case or infant death, discharge planning checklists, and many more.
- **Contributed to by more than 100 graduate NICU parents** who wish to share their personal experiences to help guide and improve care for future NICU parents and their families.
- **Desperately needed**, with research showing that NICU parents desire better communication and support at the bedside, and NICU staff describe their unmet needs for skill development especially in the area of communication with parents.

What does the online course consist of?

- The course consists of seven different core learning modules that are derived from the content areas of the “Interdisciplinary Recommendations for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents,” including:
 - Background on need for psychosocial support of NICU parents and the role of mental health professionals
 - Family-centered developmental care
 - Peer-to-peer support
 - Palliative and bereavement care
 - Discharge planning and follow-up
 - Caring for the caregiver (Staff support)
 - Communication skills
- Each module in the course will provide one hour of continuing education credit. At launch time (January, 2018), credit will be available for nurses; we are working to obtain continuing education credits for other professional disciplines.

Why is this needed?

- This course is a way to bring your entire NICU staff “up to speed” on the topic of providing emotional support for NICU parents, and to transform your NICU’s culture through the involvement of all staff simultaneously.
- NICU mothers have rates of postpartum depression that are two to three times higher than other new mothers (39-63% vs. 12-14%). NICU fathers experience depression at higher rates than average also (36% vs. 10%).
- NICU parents develop posttraumatic stress disorder at considerably higher rates than other new parents (mothers 15-53% vs. 0-14%, fathers 8-33% vs. not studied).
- Anxiety disorders are also more common among NICU parents than other new parents.
- Postpartum depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and anxiety disorders can all interfere with parent-baby bonding, and further increase babies’ risks for adverse neurodevelopmental outcomes. Sensitive parental attunement to babies’ cues and increased maternal involvement have been shown to improve babies’ functioning.
- NICU staff also have high rates of burnout (up to 54% in once recent study) and secondary traumatic stress syndrome. NICU caregivers need to know about self-care practices and other methods of staff support to mitigate against burnout.

Why an online course?

- Eliminates the difficulty and the cost of getting the entire staff together at the same time for an educational presentation.
- NICU staff are able to progress through the course content at their own pace in whatever order they choose.
- The course has a Discussion Board feature that enables discussion between staff members as well as interaction with our experts who have developed the course.

Hoped-for benefits of the Course:

- Improve patient (parent) satisfaction
- Improve staff satisfaction, lower levels of burnout and compassion fatigue
- Decrease staff turnover, leading to lower costs typically associated with training new hires
- Increase parental competence in baby's care, leading to shorter lengths of stay

The cost:

- The cost includes:
 - An Introductory Webinar which will be offered at two different times in order to familiarize your staff with the need for the course and to outline its goals.
 - Awarding of continuing education credits for module and course completion.
 - Access of all students to an online Discussion Forum which will be exclusive to your hospital's NICU, and which will be moderated by one of our staff and a graduate NICU parent (an "Expert by Experience").
 - Access to all the downloadable handouts, including bibliographies for each course that together contain > 500 references.
 - Data derived from your staff's participation in the course, including metrics detailing their satisfaction with the course and what clinical practices they intend to change as a result of taking the course.
- Supplementary items:
 - We are developing further content aimed at supporting both staff and families; these will be available as "add-ons" to the core content.
 - Topics include:
 - Caring for families with substance use
 - Utilizing techniques of trauma-informed care with families
 - Quality improvement: Transforming your NICU to provide comprehensive family support
 - Transcultural aspects of care
 - We are also offering consulting with your NICU to assist you in transforming your NICU to provide comprehensive family support. Rates available on request.

Rates available on request at: info@myNICUnetwork.com or sara@patientfamilycare.com.