

nicu Family News



The NICU Family News is produced by the Saint Barnabas Medical Center (SBMC) Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Family Advisory Council (FAC). It is designed to provide you with information we hope you will find useful during and after your family's stay in the NICU.

DID YOU KNOW...

... siblings ages 5 and up can visit the NICU during certain times if you provide proof of their up to date immunizations? "Window visits" can also be arranged for younger siblings that can't enter the NICU. You can get more details about this from your baby's nurses.

Tips For Dads From NICU Grad Dads

- Find someone to talk to, whether a friend, family or clergy. As 'the man', we tend not to show our emotions to our wives or nurses. There's no doubt we need an outlet too.
- Reach out to other dads in the NICU, even if it's to talk sports or current events. Making connections with the other dads made the experience less stressful. For me, just knowing other dads were going through the same thing was helpful.
- My twins were in the NICU over Father's Day. I remember we visited, but I also made sure to make it my day and spent some special time with my wife and our oldest child.
- I found it difficult to balance my desire to be with my wife and daughter at the hospital with the need to be productive at work. For me following a routine (i.e leaving the office at the same time every night, and going to the hospital at the same time) really helped.
- Try to make the most of the time that you do have to spend with your baby. Develop your bond through hand hugs, kangaroo care, changing diapers, giving bottles and definitely do baths. You can also talk gently to your baby and read them stories. These gave me a sense of fatherhood in the NICU.
- Do what you can to support your wife-whether it's encouraging her to get enough sleep, making sure she is eating (by cooking, picking up food, etc.) or that she is taking time to de-stress away from the hospital.
- This can be a tough time, but don't feel like you have to be strong all the time. It's normal to be scared. Just like you are being supportive to your wife, let her support you too.
- Sometimes e-mails and voicemails from concerned family and friends can pile up and lead you to feel pressured to respond. However, you may feel too emotionally and physically exhausted to do so. You could choose a close family member or friend to be the point person and be responsible for making sure updates are passed around. You can also forward your Cribnote e-mails (talk to your nurse about this) or use Care Pages (carepages.com) to share information.
- I've had a chance to talk to several NICU dads over the years. It seems many of us have the same feelings and emotions: feeling the need to be strong for our wives/children, and the frustration of not being able to 'fix' the situation. Just know you are not alone.

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Interview with Jose Batista, RRT

NICU Respiratory Coordinator since 2004 and Respiratory Therapist (RT) since 2002

Q: Why did you become an RT?

A: In college I attended a class that was recruiting respiratory therapists into the field. The speakers were two respiratory therapists that recently entered the field. Their experiences with helping patients heal from illnesses and saving lives immediately intrigued me, so I decided to pursue it.

Q: What do you do in the NICU as an RT?

A: I help babies with different lung illnesses. For instance, some premature babies are born with compromised lung function due to their prematurity. This requires me to use a number of, state of the art, breathing machines to help them overcome their illnesses, and be able to go home to their families. Some infants need help with breathing treatments, which I provide. Basically, when an infant needs oxygen I play a role in their care and treatment.

Q: What kind of education and training does it take to be an RT in our unit?

A: First you have to graduate from a school with a respiratory degree and get a state license to practice. Then, you must complete an orientation to the unit, which requires you to perform every possible respiratory care task related to NICU babies. Finally, you must complete yearly competencies regarding NICU respiratory equipment to stay up to date on the latest technology and practices.

Q: What do you like most about working in the NICU?

A: What I like most about working in this NICU, is the great collaboration among the different specialties. In my opinion, the best thing that ever happened was the creation of the NICU leadership committee and our participation in the Vermont Oxford Network. We have taken active steps to achieve better care practices by collecting data and comparing it to other hospitals nationally and internationally, in order to learn from each other.

Q: Have you seen any beneficial changes in the NICU since you have worked here?

A: I have seen many great changes in the NICU throughout the years. We have worked very hard to successfully reduce our infection rates and our chronic lung disease rates. The NICU has also shifted to encouraging mothers to breastfeed to get the benefits of breast milk. We recently even began making banked donor milk available to babies whose moms can't produce any or enough breast milk.

change 'thing' to 'things' and change verb to 'were' so it reads 'the best things that ever happened were...'



Jose Batista, RRT

Q: Did becoming a Dad change the way you think about current NICU families?

A: Becoming a dad made me sympathize more with families. Having two kids of my own made me realize how important your child's well being is. I can imagine how frightening it could be to have a baby in the NICU. However, I also know how reassuring it should be to families to know that their babies are being well taken care of by a great group of professionals. This is why we try to be transparent about our practices, so that families could see for themselves our statistics and how well our staff performs.

Q: What does family centered care in the NICU mean to you?

A: Family centered care is a great way to involve families in the day to day care of their babies. In recent years there has been the addition of a family lounge and a family library, all in the effort to make family members feel welcomed. Making the NICU family friendly encourages parents to feel like they are part of the NICU team.

A Father's Story

On March 9, 2009, my wife and I went to Saint Barnabas Medical Center (SBMC) for a routine check-up. I never imagined we wouldn't be coming home after the appointment. We were expecting our second child, a girl to be named "Annaya". We were already blessed to have a son. Now, "daddy's little girl" was on the way. My wife was suffering from high blood pressure and retaining water. Thus, the doctor told us we would be delivering the baby early. What exciting, but scary news to know that your baby would be born at only 28 weeks.

As a man you are trained to take care of and to handle problems, but this was way out of my hands. However, I did know there was a possibility my daughter would be born early because she was diagnosed in the womb with a condition called "hydrocephalus". This is a condition where the baby is unable to drain water properly in the brain and needs a shunt inserted after birth in order to drain the water. The doctors said that the water would increase her head size, but hopefully it wouldn't get too bad and Annaya would be delivered at full gestation. That did not happen. After several hours in Labor and Delivery, my wife and I were taken to the operating room for an emergency caesarean. Early on March 10, 2009, my baby girl was born weighing in at 11lb.10.5oz. She was brought over to me and my wife for a brief moment and then off to the NICU.

The NICU was a new experience for us. My first child was full term and had no issues to deal with. I watched my baby girl being attached to so many machines and monitors. This had me in tears. All I could think about as I watched her was that she would also need surgery, but I'm thankful to the NICU doctors who

reminded me they would not do any surgery on her until she was bigger and stronger. It was a relief to know that Annaya would not have to face surgery for several weeks. I learned so much in the NICU from the importance of hand washing, to the support of all the nurses, social workers, and even the daily Cribnote emails "from Annaya." I enjoyed being able to hang pictures in her isolette, and to experience Kangaroo Care with her. One of my greatest joys was being able to give her, her first bath.

After several weeks of growing it was time to have the surgery. My wife, father-in-law and I prayed in the hospital that morning for a successful outcome. My son prayed for his sister that morning before he went to school as well. A few hours later Annaya was brought back to the NICU with a glowing report that everything had gone well. It was a

great relief to me and my wife that everything went well. From that day on, Annaya was back to her old self and really had no further issues or complications while in the NICU.

I am thankful for the SBMC NICU "team" that was always there to help. They made us feel like we were in this process together. I am especially thankful to the neonatologist who took great care of Annaya. She and the rest of the team are the reason my wife and I are now involved in the NICU Buddy Program.

Annaya is now two years old and is a very energetic and smart toddler. In closing, I want to say Happy Father's Day to all of the dads and encourage you to enjoy each memory you have with your family and loved ones.

-- Johnnie Brooker



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10-2-11
Miracle Walk

to benefit the
Saint Barnabas Medical Center Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

To learn more:
MIRACLEWALK.COM
973-322-4259

Find MIRACLE WALK on FACEBOOK:
www.facebook.com/miraclegwalk

Important Phone Numbers:

NICU

973-322-5300

NICU Step-down (3100)

973-322-5310

NICU Nurse Manager

973-322-5345

NICU Social Workers

973-322-5503 or 8408

Birth Certificate Office

973-322-5327

Lactation Consultants

973-322-5684

NICU High Risk Infant

Follow-Up Program

973-322-2631

Want to Help the Family Advisory Council?

The FAC is made up of graduate parents dedicated to helping new NICU parents. We meet monthly to discuss ways to do this. We're always looking for recent graduate parents to share their experiences and ideas to make our NICU the best it can be. We welcome your ideas and participation. Contacts:

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Enjoying Summer With Your Baby

It's wonderful to be able to enjoy the great outdoors in the summer with your baby once you are home. Here are some tips from other parents for having a safe summer with your baby:

- Don't overdress your baby. Dress him in what you'd be comfortable in, you don't want him to get overheated. If you're worried about him getting cool, carry a blanket with you.
- It is usually not recommended you use sunscreen on your baby until about six months of age, so check with your pediatrician before that first sunny day outside.
- You may want to buy a shade for the stroller to protect baby from the sun. The shades that come on the strollers don't usually offer enough coverage. A wide-brimmed hat can also help keep the sun off baby's head and face.
- Most pediatricians suggest you do NOT use insect repellent until your baby is six months old but check with them to be sure.
- You can buy a bug net for over the stroller and pack and play. You may also want to consider an inexpensive pedestal rotating fan for some air on the hot humid days and let it blow near (but not directly on) baby's seat/stroller. This can help keep baby cool and keep the bugs away at the same time!
- Make sure baby's room is cool enough at night but don't let the air conditioner or fan blow directly on the baby.
- It's very important for mom and baby to be drinking enough fluids to stay hydrated. Try to keep a bottle of water with you at all times.
- If you are carrying breast milk or formula in a cooler, don't forget to put an ice pack in with it so it doesn't spoil.
- If your baby is on medications, read labels carefully and be sure to keep him out of direct sunlight if that's what the labels say.
- During the height of the summer, try to avoid being outside with your baby between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun/temperature is hottest.

