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## **Interdisciplinary Recommendations for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents**

**Developed by**

**The Workgroup for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents**

**(Convened by the National Perinatal Association)**

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### **Recommendations for peer-to-peer support for NICU parents**

1. Every parent of every baby admitted to a Special Care Nursery or NICU should be offered peer support from a “veteran” NICU parent mentor during their baby’s hospital stay. Ideally this would be a part of a NICU’s comprehensive family support program.
2. While in-person peer support during the baby’s hospital stay may be viewed as best practice, peer support can be offered to parents in a variety of different ways including email or phone support, group support, or through an online community support site for NICU families.
3. Peer support in any form is best started in the antepartum period when appropriate (as when mothers hospitalized during the antepartum period), continued through the baby’s NICU stay, as well as after baby’s discharge from the NICU. Having a consistent peer mentor throughout a NICU parent’s journey may be desirable.
4. Parents whose baby expires should be offered the opportunity to be paired with a bereavement mentor who has also experienced a neonatal loss.
5. Peer support is one element of a comprehensive family support program. Other elements should include:
  - a. An institutional and administrative champion for peer and family support;
  - b. A facilitator/coordinator which could be:
    - i. A hospital employee (psychologist, social worker, nurse, chaplain, physician),
    - ii. A trained parent and/or family support specialist,
    - iii. A former NICU parent or volunteer from one of the many non-profit peer-to-peer parent support organizations across the country;

- c. A menu of types of support available (individual and/or group in-person support, email, phone, and online support);
  - d. Parent education classes and written materials, as well as social activities;
  - e. Staff education to promote understanding of NICU families' psychosocial needs, family-centered care practices, and methods of communicating and providing support (see "Recommendations for enhancing psychosocial support of NICU parents through staff education and support," in the comprehensive document\*).
6. Any family support program that utilizes peer volunteers should provide training to the volunteers to ensure they are capable of carrying out the peer support role in a responsible and culturally sensitive way that is fully compliant with both HIPPA regulations and hospital policies.
  7. In NICUs without the resources to develop a local and comprehensive family support program of their own, parents should be referred to regional or national parent support organizations that have been evaluated by their NICU staff. Resources for parent support can be found at websites of the following organizations: the National Perinatal Association's Family Advocacy Network,<sup>1</sup> the Premie Parent Alliance,<sup>2</sup> the March of Dimes,<sup>3</sup> the Canadian Premature Babies Foundation,<sup>4</sup> and the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants.<sup>5</sup>
  8. Peer support organizations working with NICU families should consider offering support services to members of the baby's family including siblings, grandparents, and others, as needed and desired.

\*The comprehensive document is "Interdisciplinary Recommendations for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents," available elsewhere on this website ([www.support4NICUparents.org](http://www.support4NICUparents.org)).

### **References:**

1. National Perinatal Association's Family Advocacy Network at [www.nationalperinatal.org/fan](http://www.nationalperinatal.org/fan).
2. Premie Parent Alliance at <http://premieparentalliance.weebly.com/#/>.
3. The March of Dimes at [www.shareyourstory.org](http://www.shareyourstory.org).
4. The European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants at [www.efcni.org](http://www.efcni.org)
5. The Canadian Premature Babies Foundation at [www.cpbfbpc.org](http://www.cpbfbpc.org).