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### **Job Description for NICU Psychologist**

**This job description was written using a compilation of descriptions from several different NICUs. Each institution will have to make its own decisions regarding its needs and desires; the criteria described below are not absolute and are meant to be used only as a guide.**

#### **Required:**

- Ph.D. from APA-accredited university
- Pre-doctoral or post-doctoral internship in a Children's Hospital
- Dissertation topic related to infants, children, families and/or health issues
- Ability to obtain licensure in the state

#### **Preferred:**

- Infant Mental Health Certificate or documented training
- Experience in providing services in the NICU
- Competence in screening for adult perinatal emotional complications
- Experience providing education to hospital staff on families' needs and staff's self-care

#### **Responsibilities (each institution should prioritize its needs from among the following):**

- Provide family support through screening, assessment and treatment as needed for high-risk patients on the antepartum ward, for all families in the NICU and in the High Risk Infant Follow-up Clinic. The psychologist should demonstrate competency in the interpretation of screening tests and/or psychological test results. Treatment modalities for perinatal emotional distress (including, but not limited to PPD, PTSD, Generalized Anxiety Disorder) may include individual, couples, family, and group therapy.
- Collaborate with the interdisciplinary NICU team to support the care of individual families within the guidelines of confidentiality. This may involve attending medical and/or psychosocial or discharge planning rounds on a daily or weekly basis.

- Develop and implement educational services for staff, based on their knowledge and needs. Goals would be to facilitate their understanding of parents' psychosocial needs, recognition of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, methods of communicating with and supporting parents, methods for fully involving parents in family-centered developmental care, and the importance of cultural sensitivity. Educational methods including teaching during rounds, seminars, workshops, and retreats.
- Develop and implement supportive services for staff, based on their needs; this may include conducting a support group for staff and/or referral to hospital-based and/or community based behavioral health resources or other supportive services.
- Collaborate with the Palliative Care team (if such exists) to provide support to both families and staff during and after significant medical crises or the death of a fetus or newborn, including using debrief sessions as indicated.
- Provide services aimed at forging and enhancing parent-infant bonds, including offering infant-mental health dyadic therapy and/or group educational and support sessions to parents to help them recognize their baby's behavior and cues, and to become as involved as possible in family-integrated developmental care.
- If appropriately trained, provide neurodevelopmental assessment of infants in the NICU before discharge; collaborate with occupational, physical and speech therapy practitioners in this regard as indicated.
- Collaborate with, and where appropriate, provide supervision to social workers and paraprofessional NICU staff who engage in provision of support to antepartum and NICU families.
- Participate in Quality Improvement initiatives to improve the delivery of comprehensive family support services in the NICU.
- Foster relationships with psychiatrists and other referral resources as needed.
- Collaborate with other NICU staff and graduate NICU parents to develop and implement a peer-to-peer support program, if such does not already exist; offer consultation and supervision to parent leaders.
- Consider conducting clinical research to further the knowledge base about psychosocial and mental health needs of NICU parents and families.

#### **Institutional Considerations:**

Before hiring a psychologist for the NICU, consider these additional questions:

- Will the psychologist have clinical responsibilities in other areas of the hospital (for example, oncology ward)? How will his time be divided?
- To whom in the organization will the psychologist report?

- How will the psychologist's responsibilities overlap with those of social workers and other NICU staff?
- With whom will the psychologist need to collaborate? Pull these people in to the interview and hiring process so discussions can begin early.
- How will the psychologist chart findings, especially on parents who may not be patients in the hospital?
- What avenues exist for billing for the psychologist's services? (See document by the National Perinatal Association entitled "Information for NICU Mental Health Professionals" for suggestions about charting and about billing codes.)
- Will the psychologist have an academic appointment with an affiliated university, and if so, in what department?
- Will the psychologist have any teaching responsibilities (for clinical interns, students, etc.)?