



www.support4NICUParents.org

Interdisciplinary Recommendations for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents

Developed by

The Workgroup for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents

(Convened by the National Perinatal Association)

December 1, 2015

Recommendations for enhancing psychosocial support of NICU parents through staff education and support

A. Recommendations for staff education:

1. Staff education relating to the psychosocial needs of NICU families and methods of providing support to them should be provided to all NICU staff. "All NICU staff" refers to *all* disciplines that interact with NICU families on *any* level. Staff education should be provided during orientation and then periodically throughout the course of the year. Education of interdisciplinary groups should promote fruitful discussion and collaborative interaction.
2. Content of staff education should focus on:
 - a. Normal responses to infant hospitalization.
 - b. Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMAD) in NICU parents.
 - c. Methods of improving and expanding implementation of family-centered developmental care, as described in "Recommendations for involving the family in developmental care of the NICU baby," in the comprehensive document.*
 - d. Methods of delivering culturally effective care.
 - e. Self-care for staff, including management of work stresses; maintenance of work-life balance through giving attention to adequate nutrition, hydration, sleep and exercise; and management of life skills, including time management, budgetary management, and stress reduction.
 - f. Competent communication skills to better enable staff to meet the psychosocial needs of their patients and families, including providing tools in active listening, conflict resolution, the provision of support to parents during palliative and bereavement care,

and particularly for physicians, performance of antenatal consultations especially those addressing patients at the edge of viability, and how to give “bad news.”

3. A variety of methods are available to provide staff education, and each NICU should tailor their efforts to the size, composition, and needs of their staff, balanced with the hospital’s available resources.
 - a. Simulation training (especially “standardized patients” and/or “role playing”) is an effective method to incorporate into staff training.
 - b. A variety of other models of communication training can be utilized in staff education.
4. Ongoing education should be fully integrated into a variety of other platforms including case conferences, case debriefings, Morbidity & Mortality conferences, Ethics Rounds, daily medical rounds, etc.
5. It is critical that administrative leadership of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (both nursing and medical) provide support for staff education on many levels: with “buy in” and leadership, financial support, and providing paid time for staff to attend training sessions.

B. Recommendations for staff support:

- 1- Staff should support one other and respect each discipline’s contribution. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways:
 - a. Psychologists, social workers and other mental health professionals should provide support to staff as well as to families; this may be accomplished through acting as liaisons between staff and families, and/or through discussions of family dynamics and family/staff interactions at a variety of case conferences, debriefing sessions, etc.
 - b. Pastoral care staff can be supportive in a variety of ways including involvement in one-on-one interactions, group experiences, and specific activities such as remembrance ceremonies.
 - c. Nurses can support each other through mentoring relationships, teamwork, team building activities, and nursing recognition activities.
 - d. Hospital or NICU-specific Ethics Committees and Palliative Care teams can help staff minimize the occurrence of moral distress, burnout and compassion fatigue through case discussions and debriefings. NICU staff should receive both initial and ongoing training and education in ethics, particularly related to engaging in shared decision-making with parents around withholding of life-sustaining treatment, withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment, end-of-life care, and palliative care.
- 2- Staff can be emotionally supported in a variety of ways, including:
 - a. Providing adequate opportunities for staff debriefing and processing of emotions after crisis events and difficult cases, including those that are ethically and morally challenging or involve the death of a patient.
 - b. Encouraging participation in bereavement interventions during and after provision of end-of-life care, such as conducting remembrance ceremonies and giving time to attend funerals.

- c. Ensuring an optimal physical environment in which to work, including one that conforms to standards for noise and lighting, and one in which communication and safety concerns of nursing staff are adequately addressed.
 - 3- Nursing administration should provide support to nurses through provision of clear communication channels to access support from supervisors and through attention to best practices in staffing, including ensuring adequacy of staffing, provision of breaks as well as days off, and orientation and mentoring of new nurses.
 - 4- Medical administrators should ensure adequate staffing of the NICU's medical team. The importance of physicians collaborating with other members of the NICU team should be emphasized and promoted.
 - 5- Hospitals should provide support for staff that develop posttraumatic stress disorder or other psychological distress as needed, either through personal therapy or support groups, on-site counseling via employee assistance programs, pastoral care or other professional resources within the hospital. Employee wellness programs may also provide additional support through nutrition, art therapy, massage, group exercise, and/or stress reduction classes.

*The comprehensive document covering all recommendations is "Interdisciplinary Recommendations for Psychosocial Support of NICU Parents," available elsewhere on this website (www.support4NICUparents.org).

For any questions or comments about the Recommendations, please email info@support4nicuparents.org.