



NICU nurse Danielle Spencer gets a taste of what premature babies go through during their first moments of life in a typical neonatal intensive care unit. It was all part of "Premie For A Day," a special series of training sessions hosted by Saint Thomas Health Services.
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Welcome to the world

NICU nurses get rude awakening to reality of preemies

By Diane Hughes
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You are suddenly jolted awake to a flurry of activity. A crowd of people stands over you, grabbing, showing, poking and pulling. There are bright lights,

loud noises and people talking hurriedly. You can't quite see, and then you feel something brutally cold against your skin. You're scared. You're not sure what's happening, but you don't like it.

Welcome to the reality experienced by premature babies when they enter the world.

Saint Thomas Health Services, with the help of Philips Children's Medical Ventures, is working to make sure that "preemies" make their entrance into the world in a little bit calmer fashion. In most neonatal intensive care units, the admission procedure is a chaotic process where a

group of nurses accept their newest charge from the delivery room and begin going down their STABLE checklist to check sugar, temperature, airway, blood pressure and lab work and offer emotional support. But the process, as carried out in most NICUs today, can be a bit overwhelming for the delicate and undeveloped senses of a premature baby.

"We really need to step back and think about how we do admissions," Marian L'Huillier, a facilitator with Philips told NICU nurses at a recent training session

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billed as “Preemie for a Day.”

Consisting of two four-hour workshops, the interactive program gave nurses a jarring look at how their well-intended actions might affect a sensitive preemie.

“It was very eye opening,” says Leslie Pelham, a NICU nurse at Middle Tennessee Medical Center (which is part of the Saint Thomas Health Services family of hospitals).

Indeed, it was an eye-opener. During the training, several nurses were preselected to adjourn to a quiet, darkened room where they snuggled comfortably into sleeping bags. Minutes later, NICU teams stormed the room, turned on all the lights and descended upon them. The participants were diapered, measured, taped, swabbed with alcohol, and subjected to cold instruments and loud, frenzied voices.

“It was overwhelming,” says Clare Stanton, a NICU nurse at Baptist Hospital who participated in the training. “It definitely will make me think about all the physical stimuli when we come together with all our hands on the baby. We see it as teamwork when we come together. To a preemie, the stimulus is just too much.”

And that is why Ellen Gregory and Kathryn Watson, managers of the Beaman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Baptist

Hospital decided to offer this training to their nurses.

“We researched the best way to educate our nurses,” Gregory says of the decision to bring Philips on site for this training. “If you want to give your nurses education, you bring it to them.”

As to why the training is necessary and why premature babies are handled this way, according to Donna Christofel, senior global product manager with Philips, the simple reality is that it’s habit. It’s just the way things have always been done.

“Habits are slow to change,” says Christofel.

And with this preemie training as their flagship program, Philips is working to get the developmental care message out there in a very unique way.

“You can’t just sit and hear a lecture. That’s what makes this program unique,” Christofel points out.

And the demonstration drew some interesting reactions from those who “suffered” at the hands of their fellow NICU nurses. Comments included:

“It was very traumatizing, very disturbing.”

“They were pulling my arms and legs.”

“It made me want to cry.”

“Overwhelming.”

“Loud and intimidating.”

“I felt uncertain and fearful.”

And it made these nurses think twice about the way they handle premature infants with fragile, undeveloped neurological systems.

Carly McWhirter, an RN in the Baptist NICU, said she will be more conscious of what she’s doing when handling a preemie.

“Everything we do affects them,” says McWhirter. “We need to pay attention to how abruptly we do things, to be more gentle and not rush through the process.”

Since going through the training, Gregory says her staff has already taken many of the suggested techniques and put them into practice, incorporating what they learned into their daily care of the NICU’s “fragile babies.”

According to Pelham, the training will lead her to take “a more gentle approach” with the babies in her care. “I think every NICU nurse should have to [go through] this [training].”

Learn more

To learn more about Philips Children’s Medical Ventures, visit www.chmv.respironics.com. If you’re interested in entering the field of NICU nursing or are a NICU nurse who wants to obtain additional training, learn more at www.nann.org.

NICU at Baptist features state-of-the-art design

The “Preemie For A Day” training at Baptist Hospital is all part of Saint Thomas Health Services’ ongoing efforts to provide the best care for premature babies and their families. In 2009, the hospital celebrated the grand opening of the Beaman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, a facility designed to address the physical and emotional needs of these tiny patients and their families.

The unit features a “family-centered environment” that offers quality care within the comfort of nurturing surroundings. The design of the NICU features pinwheel-shaped pods that make it easier for families to have privacy and easier for hospital staff to gain quick access to their patient. Other features include pri-



Baptist Hospital’s Beaman Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, which opened in 2009, features pinwheel-shaped pods that allow families more privacy.

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vate patient rooms, sleep rooms, a family waiting room and a prayer room. Plus, the unit’s open design is complemented by soft shades of color and curving lines.

The unit also features the latest in high-level communication, with each nurse having a portable phone that keeps them in contact with key personnel. In addition, remote-controlled shades and large windows that allow for natural light help to acclimate these

babies to their new environment. For noise control, a pulsing red light activates to advise staff and family members that the environment is too loud for the delicate ears of fragile preemies.