

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...

..that clean hands are the best way for everyone coming into the NICU to help keep the babies healthy and infection free? Wash your hands well at the sink when you enter the NICU and use the gel when you get to the bedside. Use gel again after you touch anything (your face, a camera, a personal belonging, etc.).

Holistic Nursing and the NICU

Holistic nursing is based on a form of healing that considers the whole person: mind, body and spirit. Its basic premise is that proper balance in life leads to better overall health and wellness. While it has been around for many years, it has been gaining more mainstream acceptance for the past six years. That was the point when holistic nursing was first recognized by the American Nurses Association as a defined nursing specialty.

Slowly over the last few months, holistic nursing has been introduced to NICU parents and staff to help decrease stress levels and allow for more of a healing environment for our tiniest patients, their families and staff. The reasoning behind this is that the healthier the caretakers, the better the care they are able to give to their babies. SBMC employs a holistic nurse, Cathy Ponterio, RN, who visits many units in the hospital to offer different ways for patients and families to improve their health and well-being. In the NICU, she offers interested parents Guided Imagery, Reiki and Acupressure (IGM) to help lower the levels of stress and anxiety they might have related to having a sick/premature baby. She also leads a 15 minute meditation in the chapel, on the first floor, on Tuesdays and Thursdays at noon for all who want to attend. To reach Cathy, please call 973-322-8066.

Guided Imagery usually involves listening to a recording and is used to help people decrease stress and anxiety using thoughts that relax the body and mind. Cathy has recordings she gives out to patients and families and there are also many of these types of recordings available now for free or a small fee on the internet and via apps on your smartphone (e.g., marc.ucla.edu or Omvana or Simply Being apps). Using them for a few minutes a day can be very helpful in keeping calm and less stressed during difficult times in your life.

Reiki and Acupressure are hands-on therapies that use light touch to promote rest and relaxation. They are thought to work by directing ones flow of energy to where it is needed most and create balance and harmony. A harpist who works throughout the hospital has also been trying to play her harp in the NICU once a week for the babies, families and staff. This is another effort to create a healing and calm atmosphere for all.

■ ■ Saint Barnabas Medical Center
■ ■ Barnabas Health

The SBMC NICU is now on Facebook
www.facebook.com/SBMCNICU



94 Old Short Hills Road, Livingston, NJ 07039
1-888-724-7123 barnabashealth.org/sbmc

Interview With A NICU Nurse with a Holistic Nursing Background: Alyssa Devisser, RN

Q: How long have you been working in the NICU here at SBMC?

A: I have been working here in NICU for almost two years.

Q: How did you know you wanted to be a NICU nurse?

A: After graduating nursing school, I worked as a nurse for a former NICU graduate suffering from a chronic skin condition. While working with her I learned of her NICU journey and couldn't help but hope for a future in this specialty area of nursing. I was always very interested in the pediatric population, but learning her story made me more interested in neonates and their care.

Q: What have you liked most about working in the NICU?

A: There are a lot of positives about working in our NICU. Watching our babies progress is one of my favorites. Although every story is different, seeing a formerly tiny baby transition through their stay and eventually go home really puts our work here into perspective. Another thing I really enjoy about working here is the teamwork among our staff. It is comforting knowing that whenever you need a helping hand someone is there.

Q: What has been your experience with the holistic services in the NICU and when did they begin?

A: Holistic Nursing focuses on caring for the "whole person: mind, body and spirit." Because I was educated in nursing school in this way of thinking, it has become extremely important in my practice. Holistic Nursing was not used much in the NICU until September of this year, when Cathy Ponterio, RN, the holistic nurse in the hospital began visiting with our families after receiving NICU nurse referrals. So far we have mostly been making use of it with our NICU parents during their times of high stress. As far as we can see, the response has been positive so far.

Q: What do you think these services are doing for the babies, the families and even the staff?

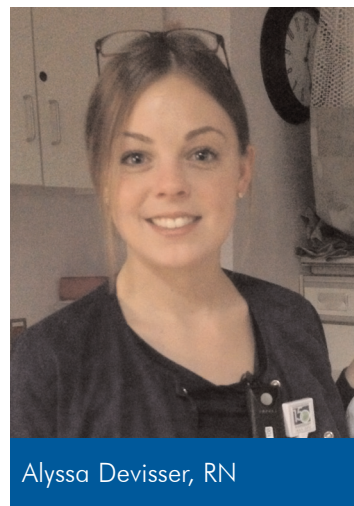
A: In our NICU, it is not uncommon for stress levels to be high, whether it is for the parents or staff. I feel that Holistic nursing allows everyone to get the little "extra care" they need. I recently saw that a NICU mother with high stress levels really benefitted from Holistic nursing. Every week day Cathy would come up to see Mommy and provide her with one of the many holistic modalities. The mother shared with me how much she enjoyed this experience and began to attend the weekly meditation offered by Holistic Services. Cathy also offers her services to staff. Over all, the feedback has been great and hopefully this will allow for more practice of Holistic services in our unit.

Q: What does Family Centered Care mean to you?

A: Family Centered Care is the groundwork for all we do here in the NICU. Although our patients are the infants themselves, our families are just as much involved in what we do. I can imagine that being separated from your infant in the NICU is a very scary feeling, so it is important that we make our families feel as comfortable and as involved as possible during their time here.

Q: What suggestions or advice do you have for NICU families?

A: My biggest piece of advice for our NICU families is to remember that self-care is very important. If you do not care for yourself, it will make it harder to take care of your baby. Taking advantage of the Holistic Nursing Services here at the hospital can help you care for yourself, be present in the moment and decrease your stress during your infants stay.



Alyssa Devisser, RN

The Perfect Storm

Noah Heaven came bursting into this world on November 2, 2012. She wasn't expected until March 6, 2013. However, as luck would have it she was trying to show her big brother up and arrive at 22 weeks gestation, 4 weeks earlier than he did. She weighed 1 pound, 2 ounces again "beating" her brother's 2 pound birth weight.

Our journey began post super storm Sandy. I woke up to find my truck underneath a tree. The next day I wasn't feeling that well and had a horrible headache. I attributed it to the stress of having no car, midterms being due and the inability to really eat much during my pregnancy.

I was able to get a rental car, but as soon as I got home I noticed I had some spotting and thought it best to go to the hospital (not SBMC). A while after arriving at the hospital, I was told that I should go home and miscarry because my fetus wasn't viable at a few days shy of 22 weeks. I was devastated to hear that this little life I had been carrying around for the last five months wasn't even considered to be a life and that someone thought that she didn't deserve a chance at life.

Shortly after hearing this news, I was able to get in contact with my sister's OB who is affiliated with SBMC. He was able to reach out to the perinatal specialist at SBMC.

She said that if I could make my way to her, she'd gladly try to help me. Unfortunately, the roads were bad and the power was still out in most areas so I couldn't get to SBMC that night.

Upon arriving at SBMC, I was told that I had three options concerning my pregnancy. Unfortunately, they would all likely result in my baby being stillborn. They said that whatever decision I made, I would have full support from the staff at SBMC.

I decided to try bed rest which lasted one day before I went into active labor. Everything happened so fast. I was telling my new nurse that I thought I was having contractions and once she confirmed that, I was rushed to labor and delivery. I didn't even get a chance to meet the NICU team before I heard, "It's a girl." Then, I waited for what felt like forever to learn that she was in fact alive despite what everyone thought would happen.

(continues on page 4)



The 15th Annual Miracle Walk to benefit the NICU at SBMC, was held at Verona Park on October 4, 2015. The event was a big success and raised over \$337,000 for the NICU. A big thank you to all who supported the event! In addition to the usual festivities of face painters, balloon artists and costumed characters, there was a carnival with games and treats which many stayed to enjoy at the end of the walk. This was in honor of the special 15th Anniversary of the walk and the even more noteworthy 150th Anniversary of the Saint Barnabas Medical Center. Pictures of all the festivities can be found at www.miraclegwalk.com.

Mark your calendars, the 16th Annual Miracle Walk will be held on 10/16/16 and we hope to see many of you there!

Important Phone Numbers:

- NICU
973-322-5300
- NICU Step-down (3100)
973-322-5310
- NICU Nurse Manager
973-322-8938
- NICU Social Worker
973-322-5503
- NICU Case Managers
973-322-2045
973-322-2678
- 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:

Eileen Steffen
NICU Quality & Research
Coordinator
esteffen@barnabashealth.org
973-322-5453

Hayley Hirschmann
FAC Coordinator
hhirschmann@barnabashealth.org
973-322-5453

Thank a NICU Nurse Today

As part of a national movement, the hospital recently started trying to acknowledge nurses that are doing an especially great job by giving them DAISY Awards. In our opinion, there are LOTS of these nurses in the NICU. How better for the hospital to find this out than from you, the family of a baby being cared for here? If you feel one of our NICU nurses has shown exceptional compassion and care to you and your baby/babies, please take a moment to nominate him or her. The nomination form, available on the bulletin board in the NICU family lounge, is quick and just asks you to describe a situation or story that shows how your nurse made a meaningful difference in your/your loved ones care. Award forms can be returned to the NICU nurse manager or other NICU staff. You are also welcomed to just email your story to Elizabeth Gilligan, RN, BSN, CPHQ, Manager of Quality and Performance Improvement at egilligan@barnabashealth.org.



Interview with Alyssa Devisser, RN (continued from page 2)

Q: Anything else you would like to say about your job in the NICU?

A: My job in the NICU has opened my mind to the many challenges NICU families face. It has helped mold my practice into primarily focusing on Family Centered Care to help the outcome of both the infant and families alike. Holistic Nursing has helped me explore Family Centered Care in a different light and has helped me to appreciate the interconnectedness of the two.

The Perfect Storm (continued from page 3)

The first few days in the NICU had more downs than ups for Noah, but what made those days more bearable was the support from the nurses and doctors. While I'd had a premature baby years ago, this was very different. With my son I was told he'll be fine he just has to gain weight. With Noah it seemed like each day was a new challenge or a reminder that it's a miracle that she's alive and that her tests have been normal thus far, but that can always change. The one thing I would always say is that there has been nothing normal concerning Noah so let's keep hoping for more miracles, and that's just what we got.

After her long journey, Noah finally made it home after 176 days at SBMC. I'm thrilled to report that Noah is now a happy, loving, sassy, smart, energetic, and sweet 3 year old and if it wasn't for SBMC I wouldn't have the pleasure of being her mom. I can never express how grateful we are to each and every nurse, doctor, parent buddy and staff member that played any part in our journey. We love you all! **-Tonia R. and Paul**