

# NICU Family News



*The NICU Family News is produced by the Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Family Advisory Council. It is designed to provide you with information we hope you will find useful during and after your family's NICU stay.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

### **You can request to have a NICU Parent Buddy?**

A NICU Parent Buddy is a parent who has already had a baby (or babies) in our NICU and can give you emotional and informational support. Because they've had NICU experiences similar to you, they can give very special support that only another parent who "has been there" can. You can request a "Buddy" by filling out a yellow NICU Parent Buddy Program info sheet (found either in the NICU Library or the top drawer in the NICU parent lounge) and give it to any NICU nurse to get to the buddy program coordinator.

Facebook.com/CBMCNICU | [rwjbh.org/cbmcnicu](http://rwjbh.org/cbmcnicu)

## Read To Your Baby

### ***In Support of the National NICU Read-a-Thon: September 9 to 19, 2024***

Former NICU parents often say how helpless they felt at times while their baby was in the NICU. The nurses at CBMC have been focusing in recent years on encouraging and supporting parents to hold their babies and be involved in their care whenever possible, to try to cut down on this feeling. Also, in the last few years, research has shown that reading out loud to sick and premature babies brings extra special benefits to the babies as well as their parents.

To show our support for reading to babies from birth onward, our NICU once again will be participating in this year's National NICU Read-a-thon. More than 100 NICUs from around the U.S. compete in this event to highlight the importance of reading to babies early and often. From September 9 to 19, 2024, NICU staff will be giving out new, free board books and encouraging all families to read to their babies every time they are together in the NICU.

Each time you (or another family member/visitor) read to your baby/babies during the Read-a-Thon, you should put a reading ticket with baby's name on it in the box at the nursing station in your baby's pod. All families that participate in the Read-A-Thon will be entered to win a prize basket which will be drawn at the end of the event. Another prize basket will also be given to the baby that is read to the most during the event. We hope that bringing awareness about the many benefits of reading will keep families reading to their babies often once they are home from the NICU.

For NICU parents, reading out loud to baby is a way to be involved with them in a positive way that is not medical but rather a "normal" thing a parent would do with a baby. Often, reading this way to babies in the NICU helps parents bond and feel a little bit "closer" to their baby. It's also something the parents can do for their baby at a time when they may feel as if there might not be much more they can do.

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## Let's Get to Know: Elyssa Lowman, BSN, RNC-NIC NICU Patient Care Coordinator

### ***How long have you been working at CBMC and in any other NICU?***

I have been working at CBMC's NICU since April 2024 and in a Level 3 NICU since 2019.

### ***Where did you receive your nursing education and training?***

I received my Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA.

### ***Please describe what your role/responsibilities are in the NICU?***

As the Patient Care Coordinator (PCC) for the night shift, I am in charge of the unit. I attend deliveries and support the staff with any NICU babies that they need help with. I can find answers to any questions that families may have and I make sure that the best care is being given to the patients and families! I love being in the charge role and strive to be the leader that I would have wanted when I was a new nurse.

### ***How did you know you wanted to be a NICU nurse?***

I knew NICU was for me while spending one day shadowing in a NICU while I was in school. No other patient population on any floor in the hospital had sparked the joy, passion, and curiosity like NICU did for me. I also prefer babies to any other people!

### ***What do you like the most about working in the NICU?***

I love watching the babies grow and seeing new families form right in front of my eyes.

### ***What does Family Centered Care mean to you?***

It means that even though the baby is our main focus, we are responsible for the entire family. On top of our goal of a healthy baby at discharge, we also want them to go home to a happy, healthy and confident family.



### ***Do you have any suggestions or advice for NICU families in general or about being involved in their babies care?***

Yes, remember no question is ever "stupid!" You can ask the same question, seven times. We understand how overwhelming it can be. Every staff member here is willing to get the answers to anything you want to know. Feel empowered to be curious and to understand your baby and their care!

### ***Anything else you would like to say about your job or the NICU?***

I am thankful to be the PCC here and look forward to meeting you, answering your questions, and being whatever you need me to be for your baby's stay here in the NICU.

### ***What do you like to do in your free time?***

I love video games, heavy metal concerts, and I am waiting for the birth of a new cousin!

## A NICU Short-Stay Story

While my story does not have much in common with families' of babies who have long-stay NICU journeys, my husband and I, nonetheless, were faced with an unexpected turn in the birth story of our first child, Quinn.

I was induced at 41 weeks after a healthy and smooth pregnancy. After 10 hours in labor, I finally started actively pushing, which proved to be a fatiguing experience that lasted for two hours and fifteen minutes and required me to be on oxygen for the entire duration. Our baby boy simply would not come out.

My OBGYN attempted a vacuum-assisted delivery, and as a final resort before pivoting to an emergency C-section, turned to forceps. Alas, Quinn was delivered and I was in a state of complete exhaustion. Being my first, I really did not know what to expect immediately upon delivery but (if even only from the movies and television), I knew a cry indicated a healthy baby. Even though I was blurry eyed, my motherly instincts had already kicked in and I knew something was off when Quinn let out a struggling whimper and was instantly whisked onto a table and surrounded by a team of nurses and my doctor.

My husband went over to see what was going on and we learned that my umbilical cord had been wrapped around Quinn's neck four times – something my OBGYN later revealed she had only seen with less than a handful of babies in her career. My umbilical cord had effectively been functioning as a bungee cord: every time I pushed, Quinn would bounce right back up. As a result, his oxygen levels were extremely low and he needed to be rushed to the NICU for care and monitoring. My husband thought to ask to let me hold Quinn for a moment before he left the room, for which I am grateful.

I felt nervous and confused. I did not have any prior examples to draw upon for how things were supposed to go after having a baby. So, I leaned into the reassurance I felt due to the excellent care and



information provided by the NICU doctors and nurses. Every interaction made me feel like Quinn was getting the best care possible, and for that I am forever appreciative.

Quinn was only in the NICU for three days (a rather short time in comparison to many NICU babies) before his oxygen levels stabilized and he was discharged. However, it was certainly long enough to leave a lasting impression on me. Due to the attention and care Quinn received, I felt confident upon leaving the hospital that things would only improve from there.

And they did. Today, Quinn is a healthy and happy five-year-old who just started kindergarten. He enjoys playing with his little brother (most of the time!), friends and cousins, building Legos, playing baseball, listening to music, going to the beach, swimming, riding his scooter, and playing at the park. He can't wait to learn how to read on his own and is working on his skating skills so he can play ice hockey (just like his Dad).

I wish all the NICU families (short and long stay) the best! **-Samantha W.**

## Important Phone Numbers

**NICU:** 973-322-5300

**NICU Clinical Director:**  
973-322-8938

**NICU Social Worker:** 973-322-5503

**NICU Case Managers:**  
973-322-5909/973-322-2678

**Birth Certificate Office:**  
973-322-5327

**Lactation Consultants:**  
973-322-9088

**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.

**Contact: Hayley Hirschmann**  
FAC Coordinator  
Hayley.Hirschmann@rwjbh.org  
973-322-9486

## Read to Your Baby (cont'd from page 1)

Very important research also shows that babies in the NICU have important brain development going on and reading to these babies helps aid in this development. Believe or not, it seems it is helpful to both speak to your baby AND read out loud to them. Neonatologists at a NICU in Boston found it so important that they set a goal for parents, or other family members, to read to their NICU baby at least once every day. Research also shows that from birth and beyond, in addition to advancing brain development, language skills, and vocabulary, reading out loud can also build listening and memory skills over time.

So, bring a few books to the NICU and try to read to your baby each day. You will be glad you did! If you want to read out loud to your baby in your native language, please do so. There are many wonderful books available to read to your baby. Here are some favorites some of our NICU graduate parents recommend:

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|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. Goodnight Moon                              | 7. Where is Spot?                |
| 2. The Very Hungry Caterpillar                 | 8. Jamberry                      |
| 3. Guess How much I love You?                  | 9. Good Night Gorilla            |
| 4. Five Little Monkeys                         | 10. Moo, Baa, La, La, La!        |
| 5. Llama Llama Nighty-Night                    | 11. The Colors of Us             |
| 6. Brown Bear, Brown Bear,<br>What Do You See? | 12. If You Give a Mouse a Cookie |

You can also take books out from your local library to read to your baby/child/children. Additionally, websites like monkeypen.com and freekidsbooks.org have free downloadable children's stories and resources in several languages. Readaloud.org also has good resources and suggestions for how to keep reading going throughout your baby's childhood.

## The 24th Annual Miracle Walk is almost here!

**Sunday, October 6, 2024 | Verona Park**

Bring the whole family to the 24th Annual Miracle Walk to benefit the Shyan Sun, MD NICU at Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center. Enjoy the DJ, face painting and free bagels, donuts and coffee, all while raising money for our favorite cause.



**Register your team now, make a donation or learn more at [miraclegwalk.com](http://miraclegwalk.com) or [facebook.com/miraclegwalk](https://facebook.com/miraclegwalk)**