

NICU Family Advisory Council

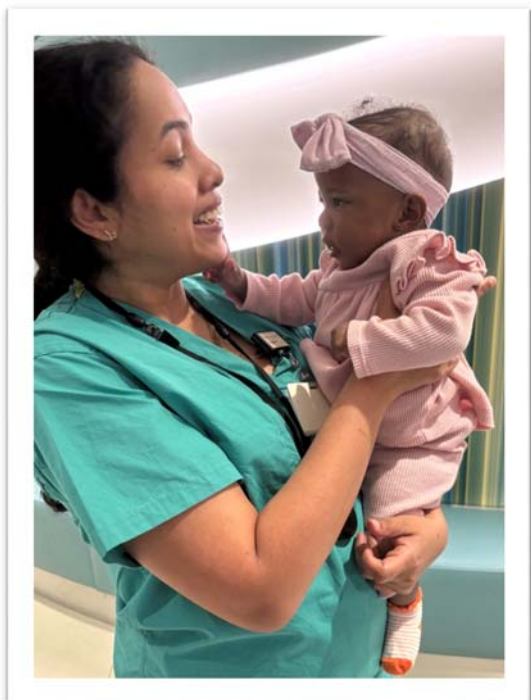
NICU Family News

Here Come the NICU Baby Buddies

The CBMC NICU is starting to slowly roll out a program where trained adult volunteers partner with our staff to assist with the needs of specific NICU babies by holding them or reading to them when their parents or other designated support people are not able to be here. All such babies are medically cleared and identified by medical staff as being appropriate for these interactions with a volunteer. Also, for now, these volunteers are all adults who had a child or grandchild in the NICU or are retired NICU nurses. These NICU volunteers go through several hours of hospital and NICU trainings and meet all the general hospital volunteer requirements (including background and reference checks in addition to medical screenings).



Wendy, our first official Baby Buddy volunteer.



NICU graduate Shiloh recently visiting Dr. Rani.

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...

...that whether your baby has been in the NICU for a short or long stay, a professional hospital based photographer can come to their NICU room to take photos of them, you, or you and your baby/babies just before discharge? See the Bella Baby information cards in the NICU Family Lounge for details or text Bella Baby at 862-420-0845 to schedule your photo session or ask questions. There is no cost for the session, just for the photos if you choose to buy them.

We offer this program because parents often can't be here all the time and human contact in the NICU can help:

- babies gain weight faster
- reduce babies length of stay in the hospital
- improve babies sleep
- reduce babies stress responses and improve immune system functioning

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Let's Get to Know: Joanne D. Bishara, MD, Neonatologist *Associate Director of Neonatology*

Where did you do your education/training?

I earned my medical degree from NYU School of Medicine and completed my internship and residency in pediatrics at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital New Brunswick. Then I received my sub-specialty training in neonatology at NYP-Columbia University and became board certified in pediatrics and neonatal-perinatal medicine.

How did you know you wanted to be a doctor/NICU doctor?

I have always been truly fascinated with the miracle that is a newborn and all it takes to ensure their healthy transition into this world. In this field, I am able to work with the most resilient yet most vulnerable of patients, impacting change for the lifetime of these babies and their families. It is a great privilege for me to treat these newborns.

How long have you been working in this NICU and where did you work prior/in what capacity?

I have been with the CBMC NICU since October of 2023 as the associate director. Prior, I was the Director at NYP-Queens/Weill Cornell, driving integration across the network, expanding scope of practice in the unit, changing the staffing model to allow for better continuity of care and improving quality of care. I have also worked at Hackensack University Medical Center/Hackensack Meridian Health for close to 10 years where I managed a team of mid-level providers, led our family centered care team, and most importantly cared for sick and premature newborns.

What do you like most about your job?

I love being a part of a multidisciplinary team that delivers superior quality of care to our most vulnerable patients. I have the most rewarding career!



What does Family Centered Care mean to you?

It means practicing with a philosophy of care based on mutually beneficial partnerships among patients, families, and healthcare providers, an approach where patients and their families are central to the planning and delivery of healthcare.

What suggestions or advice do you have for NICU families in general, or around being involved in their baby's care?

I like to remind parents not to forget that we are assisting YOU in caring for your baby. You are not a guest in this unit. Be empowered in that. Do not be intimidated by the equipment and environment. Participate in their care. Participate on rounds. Ask questions. Advocate for your baby. Have an open honest line of communication with your healthcare team, building trust and knowing he/she is getting the best quality of care.

Is there anything else you would be willing to tell us about yourself? (i.e. - any fun fact?)

Right after receiving my acceptance letter to medical school, I went sky diving!...and lived long enough to eventually tell my family.



Faith Over Fear

It was just last July when my pregnancy was moving along normally. I had an anatomy scan that looked good. I shared with the nurse that I was having some pressure, so I was scheduled for an appointment with Maternal Fetal Medicine for August. Unfortunately, by that next weekend I was in a lot of pain and could hear my OBGYN's voice in my head saying go to CBMC if you think you will need the NICU. I called my husband to meet me in the emergency department and then called an Uber to get me there.

The health care team was going to admit me for a cerclage when I was diagnosed with a bad infection. I was put on magnesium to buy some time and get steroid injections to help my baby's lungs to develop. The next morning, at 23 weeks and 1 day gestation, I gave birth to my tiny 1 pound, 4 ounce baby, Shiloh. In the delivery room the staff held her close to her Daddy and me for a kiss and a quick picture before they rushed her off to the NICU.

Everything happened so fast at the delivery that I don't even remember having time to feel scared. But, when I was rolled into Shiloh's room in the NICU a few hours later, I was terrified. She looked like the tiniest little thing I had ever seen and was covered in tubes and lines and glowed blue from the bilirubin lights above her.

When I saw her like that, all I could think to do was pray, so I did. I also made a decision in that moment to choose faith over fear. I decided I would try to make each day with my baby in the NICU an opportunity for

joy and tried to make each interaction with her one that was joyous and positive. I would read and sing and touch and hold her as much as was possible each day. I did

not want her to sense any fear coming from me and I kept praying and praying. With this mindset, I was able to appreciate the NICU as a calm, clean, quiet place to spend time with my baby as she grew. I would take in all the beautiful aquarium photos and baby friendly artwork on the walls as I walked to her isolette to see her each day. Her 11-year-old sister would help me bring good energy to her room on many days as well.

The nurses were always very welcoming and taught my husband and me everything we needed to know to care for Shiloh. They took such great care of her and we missed them terribly when after 99 days here at CBMC we were transferred to another hospital for a surgical procedure, and the last two weeks of her hospitalization.

Shiloh is now 10 months old, is very affectionate, and loves hugs and kisses from her family members. She also loves bath time and is very nosy and crawling all over! I think the best thing I did for Shiloh while she was in the hospital was to choose faith over fear and always try to remember that there was light further down at the end of the tunnel!

-Shiloh's mom, Jessica



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

NICU Baby Buddies (cont'd from page 1)

Baby Buddy Volunteers Will NOT:

- feed or diaper any babies
- do skin to skin care
- hold any babies less than 34 weeks gestation
- interfere with your role as a parent
- take your baby out, or return them to their bed without help from staff
- give any medical assistance

Wendy, our first Baby Buddy volunteer to be fully trained and available in our unit to support staff and families is an ex-NICU grandma of a 24-weeker preemie, who is now almost 4 years old. Her interest to be involved with the babies and families was heightened due to the fact that she could not come see or hold her grandbaby during her 3 month NICU stay due to the pandemic. After much training in the NICU, Wendy recently read to several babies and held one in need of some extra support. Wendy said, "It was great." So far the nurses are excited to have Wendy's help and are looking forward to a couple of others Baby Buddy volunteers finishing training and partnering with our team as well.

If you have any questions about the program, would like to request a Baby Buddy or would like to choose to not have a Baby Buddy, please talk to your baby's nurse.

24th Annual Miracle Walk Sunday, October 6, 2024

Please save the date for the 24th Annual Miracle Walk to benefit the Shyan Sun, MD Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center NICU. Held in beautiful Verona Park, there is always a DJ, fun activities and costumed characters for the kids!

Hope to see you and the whole family there in October!



To make a donation or for more information visit: miraclegwalk.com or facebook.com/miraclegwalk