

Family Advisory Council



The NICU Family News is produced by the Shyan Sun, M.D. Neonatal Intensive Care Unit 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 the CMBC NICU and can give you emotional and informational support.

Since they share your NICU experience, these parents offer unique, firsthand support. You can request a "Buddy" by filling out a yellow NICU Parent Buddy Program info sheet. This sheet is located in your NICU welcome bag, the NICU Library, or the top drawer of the NICU Family Lounge. Once filled out, hand the form to any NICU nurse, who will give it directly to the program coordinator.

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NICU Discharge and CPR Classes are Available!

Please use this guide to prepare for your baby's graduation from the NICU.

General Information

- **Eligibility:** Parents can attend any class at any time during their infant's hospital stay.
- **Attendance:** You may attend classes as many times as you wish.
- **Registration:** Call Angela at 973-322-2916 to reserve your spot.
- **Schedules:** Check the table or flat screens in the Family Lounge, or the screen near the handwashing sinks in the welcome area. They are also on the table in the Family Lounge.

NICU Discharge Class

- **Timing:** Offered 3 times a month.
- **Requirement:** Babies must be at least 32 weeks gestation for parents to start attending.
- **Benefit:** Attending early helps answer critical take-home questions.
- **Topics Covered:**
 - Safe sleep environments
 - Infant bath safety
 - Car seat safety and installation
 - Feedings and nutrition
 - Home equipment and childproofing
 - Scheduling baby's follow-up appointments
 - Knowing when to call the doctor vs. going to the emergency department

NICU Infant CPR Class

- **Timing:** Held 3 times a month.
- **Registration:** Space is limited; please sign up as early as possible.
- **Topics Covered:**
 - Basic infant CPR
 - Choking emergency safety skills
 - Hands-on skills practice
 - Emergency response training
- **Alternative Option:** If you cannot attend, ask any NICU staff member for a Take-Home CPR Kit.

Vivianna the Rockstar

“Our story begins just after Christmas in December 2022. My husband, Joe, and I were preparing for the February arrival of our first baby, Vivianna. At 33 weeks pregnant, I went to a routine checkup. I hadn’t been feeling well, but I assumed it was just a winter cold.

The appointment started normally but quickly shifted. The doctor revealed I had severe symptoms of preeclampsia and needed immediate hospital evaluation. Ignorant to the signs, I had no idea my high blood pressure, swelling, and sudden weight gain were medical emergencies. Because we thought it was a routine visit, this was the first appointment Joe hadn’t attended with me. It was not how we planned it. The hospital bag wasn’t packed, the nursery wasn’t finished, and I hadn’t even had my baby shower yet. It was simply too early.

At the hospital, my blood pressure continued to climb, and I was admitted. The plan was to monitor me until 34 weeks, then induce. Much of those next few moments are a blur of shock. However, I distinctly remember the Maternal-Fetal Medicine (MFM) doctor who saw my distress. She held my hand, told me it was okay to cry, and shared that she had once been in my shoes with her own baby. Her honesty and gentleness assured me we were in good hands.

I was placed on a magnesium drip and continuously monitored. In the early hours of New Year’s Eve, I was induced. I’ll always smile remembering a staff member bringing us festive hats and beads to ring in the New Year. After 40 hours of labor with little progression, our beautiful girl was born via C-section on New Year’s Day, weighing 4 lbs 5 oz. With the NICU team ready in the OR, we snapped a quick picture before Joe followed her to the unit.

My memories immediately following surgery are fuzzy due to the anesthesia, magnesium, and sheer exhaustion. Sitting at my newborn’s bedside six weeks before her due date felt entirely surreal. Soon after, I was moved back to the postpartum unit for another 24 hours on the magnesium drip. Confined to my bed, I was physically separated from Vivianna. I am so thankful for Joe and our family, who visited her, sent pictures, and video-called me.

The moment I was cleared to stand, I asked Joe to take me to the NICU. At the entrance, a kind security officer explained the protocols and offered words of hope, reminding me that he watched moms get stronger every single day.

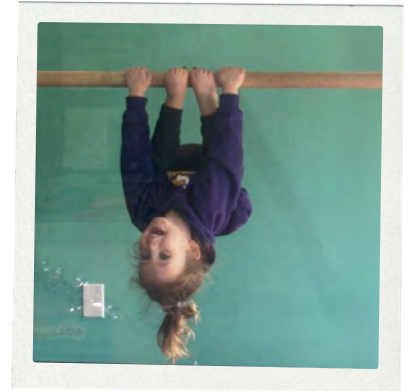
It might sound strange, but the NICU quickly became my safe place. It was quiet. The gentle bubbling of Vivianna’s CPAP machine lulled me into calmness and the occasional unexpected nap. The nurses were incredibly encouraging. Vivianna was the patient, but sometimes I think those nurses saved me, too. It was truly where my healing began.

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They taught us so much. We had taken standard newborn classes, but nothing prepares you for changing a diaper through the armholes of an isolette, or swaddling around a web of monitor wires. The nurses showed us that our tiny baby wasn't fragile. By NICU standards, they joked she wasn't even that "little." They called her a rockstar, helping me see her strength, and my own. We even met a nurse who was a NICU grad herself, giving us a beautiful glimpse into our own little warrior's future.



Vivianna spent 10 days on the unit learning to breathe on her own without support, regulate her body temperature, and eat. She proved to be a fighter from the start. On her second-to-last day, Vivi took matters into her own hands, pulled out her feeding tube, and despite the nurses best efforts, refused to let them put it back. She took full bottle feeds from that moment on and was discharged the next day.

Looking at Vivianna today, you would never guess her entrance into the world came with so much drama, or that she arrived six weeks early and spent her first 10 days in an isolette. I am so grateful to share our story. It may not be the journey we originally pictured, but it is beautiful, and it is in no small part thanks to the nurses, doctors, and staff who cared for us." **-Angela Furnari, Former NICU Parent**

Let's Get To Know: Melanie (Mel) Naratil CBMC NICU Neonatal Nurse Practitioner

Where did you do your education and professional training?

I joined the Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center Neonatal Intensive Care Unit team as a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner this February. Prior to this role, I worked as a registered nurse in the Lenox Hill Hospital Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in New York City for seven years. I obtained that position directly after graduating from college and am grateful to have started my nursing career in neonatal intensive care. I earned my Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Villanova University and completed my Neonatal Nurse Practitioner training at the University of Connecticut. Additionally, I am a Certified Lactation Counselor and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT).



How did you know you wanted to work in the NICU?

I have always been drawn to caring for the neonatal population. I enjoy the unique nature of the NICU, where patients are incredibly vulnerable, yet the environment is filled with moments of hope and joy. It's amazing to witness the resilience of babies and how our care can influence the trajectory of their whole lives. Being part of a team whose care can positively influence a child's entire life is what has inspired me to pursue a career as a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner.

Anything else you would like to share with the staff?

I'm excited to join the CBMC NICU team and am grateful for the opportunity to learn from such a smart, experienced, patient, kind, and dedicated group. I look forward to getting to know everyone and am always open to learning from those around me. I appreciate the warm welcome I've already received.

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

Spiritual Care Department:

973-322-5015

Family Advisory Council Accomplishments in 2025

- Continued Food Insecurity/Snack Donations for NICU Parents
- Continued NICU Parent Buddy Program
- Continued to provide feedback/input to NICU/hospital for family presence and visitor guidelines
- Continued Monthly, In-Person NICU Family Pizza Nights
- Updated NICU Family Messages of Hope on NICU TV Screens
- Increased Participation in National NICU Read-A-Thon
- Continued Making Welcome Bags with Board Books for all NICU Families
- Celebrations for Staff and Families on Special Occasions
- Continued Monthly FAC Meetings
- Continued Quarterly NICU Family Newsletter (with staff and family stories)
- Continued Weekly NICU 101 Meetings In-Person For Current NICU Families

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: Stephanie D'Andrea

FAC Coordinator

stephanie.dandrea@rwjbh.org

973-322-9486

Save The Date The 26th Annual Miracle Walk Sunday, October 4, 2026

The 26th Annual Miracle Walk to benefit the Shyan Sun, M.D. Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Cooperman Barnabas Medical Center will be held on Sunday, October 5 at Verona Park. Bring the whole family and enjoy the DJ, face painting, complimentary bagels/donuts and coffee, all while raising money for our favorite cause.



Learn more and register your family or a whole team now at miraclegwalk.com or facebook.com/miraclegwalk