

nicu Family News



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

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 CBMC NICU and can give you emotional and informational support. Because they have 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.

Self-Care Tips for NICU Parents

Some of our former NICU parents wanted to share their best self-care tips, from when they were in the NICU, with current NICU families like you. So, here they are:

- My best piece of advice is to accept help and trust the process. Having had a NICU baby first followed by a non-NICU baby, cherish the support you get in the NICU. Take time after spending time with baby to "regroup" (shower/eat/take a deep breath) knowing your baby is getting excellent care. As tempting - and instinctual - as it may feel to want to stay by their side all the time, they're only as strong as their mama is, so don't forget about yourself.
- I bought comfortable dresses and blouses with buttons to wear to the NICU to make it easy to pump and kangaroo. I also changed my hair style, to look and feel different; more confident.
- I recommend keeping a journal or writing letters to your premie/NICU baby. Writing is therapeutic. Also, whenever I look back at my journal or letters, I'm glad I wrote them because I can see how far we have all come as a family.
- Be sure to eat regularly. Like actual meals. It's super important to your strength and well-being – even more so if you are pumping or breastfeeding. You can ask your family and friends start a meal train. There are apps for it. Or just a sign up genius. They can bring it to the hospital. You can go down stairs and get it from them and see a friendly face. Or they can drop off at your house and you can heat it up.
- We prayed. We had a prayer book by his isolette and I would read the Bible while nursing.
- Celebrate every milestone for your baby. Our baby was born at 2:05 pm. So every day at 2:05 pm we would try to be by him and take a picture in the NICU. You pick the milestones you want to celebrate – one week, one month, etc. The NICU Family Library has free milestone cards you can take, personalize and keep.
- If others ask what they can do, try to tell them how they can help you. Ask for help cleaning the house, making a freezer meal, caring for your other children, etc. Take trusted people up on their offers to help.

(continues on page 4)

**Cooperman Barnabas
Medical Center**

**RWJBarnabas
HEALTH**

Interview With Nancy Edelman, RN NICU Quality Improvement Coordinator

How long have you worked here and in what roles?

I first worked here in 1981 as a graduate nurse. Initially on the Renal Transplant floor for 9 months and then the NICU (then called Special Care Nursery). I worked in the NICU for 20 years as a staff nurse and loved every second of it. I also held the position of Co-Chair for the NJ Nurses Union for 10 years and I'm proud to say they represented the professional standards for the nurses. I set a professional goal to move to another area of nursing at the 20 year mark in my career. So after 20 years in the NICU, I spent 9 years managing the Pediatric Specialty Center and the Medical Specialty division at the Ambulatory Care Center, which was very rewarding. After 29 years with the Barnabas system, I moved to another outpatient organization for the next 10 years of my career. That was also rewarding as it allowed me to see how much support is needed and available to patients of all ages. I feel so lucky to have had these experiences and to be able to continue to grow as a nurse. And now, full circle, in July I returned to my roots and came back to the NICU as part of the Quality team. I'm beyond impressed with the work that continues to be done for the NICU patients and families. Thank you for welcoming me back!

Is there a change in the NICU that has impressed you most since coming back?

I would say that working with the Vermont Oxford Network, consisting of hundreds of NICUs across the US, and Canada, really showcases the advances in care for our precious patients. As a team we review the outcomes of all of our very low birthweight babies and our results are quite impressive. The SBMC NICU continues to shine

among this network. Working with the team of neonatologists here is also truly collaborative which is impressive in itself!

How do you feel that your role in Quality can benefit the NICU?

I feel that working in medicine should always be a learning experience. Clinically, there is always something that can be reviewed, improved upon and measured for success. I see that as an important part of my role. Just as important is the ability to work with and help the families of the babies that are cared for in the NICU.

How have you been working with the NICU patients and their families since coming back to the NICU?

While I don't directly work with parents, I do have the privilege of working with the Family Advisory Council, an amazing group of volunteer NICU graduate parents who are always trying to help other families cope with the NICU experience. They take several opportunities throughout the year to honor and spoil the staff they believe made a huge difference in their lives. I also still hear from parents of babies I cared for 30 years ago and it warms my heart to see their family photos and learn about what those "babies" are doing now. I feel that my previous experience as a staff NICU nurse continues to help me in my new role. (continues on page 4)



21st Annual Miracle Walk Supports CBMC

The 21st Annual Miracle Walk to benefit the CBMC NICU, held virtually on October 10, 2021, was a great success, raising over \$175,000. Plan to join us for a fantastic in-person walk in Verona Park on October 9, 2022!

Learn more:
miraclewalk.com | facebook.com/miraclewalk



NICU Family Story

Our son Liam was born at 23 weeks, in April of 2018. He weighed only 1 lb., 0.1oz, as did his identical twin brother Nicholas. That day was the most beautiful and terrifying day of our entire life when a parent's worst fear and greatest love can be found all in the same place. The plastic incubators held the most fragile human lives. The bright lights, the beeping machines, and the vibrating ventilator. You can see it as depressing and harsh, but I saw it as a place of incredible hope.

Despite our children being in incubators, we were still able to be parents. We still held their fragile bodies, despite all the tubing. We changed their tiny diapers and touched their fragile fingers. We did everything a parent would do, but we just did it in the NICU. They were our babies and we needed them to feel that we were there for them, willing to fight all the way. But this journey was a long one. One day, you can go through all the emotions: fear, anger, happiness. You learn to take one day at a time. First it's hour by hour, then day by day, then week by week. But you draw on strength you never knew you had. You experience emotions you never knew were in you.

In May of 2018, God decided to give Nicholas a different path and we lost him. We were robbed of so many moments with him and that we will never be able to give him but now he is watching over his brother Liam. Liam, you are the most strong, smart, and beautiful little boy we ever laid eyes on. You are the reflection of your brother and forever 2 in 1. After 148 days, we got the chance to bring you home for the very first time.



Today, Liam is a smart and happy 3 year old little guy that is receiving early intervention one time a week for Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapy. He is doing amazing and we are so proud of him! He is doing everything a little boy his age should be doing and all his therapists say so!

To all the NICU parents: Congratulations on bringing life into this crazy world. Whether your pregnancy was short or long, whether this day was expected or unexpected, I understand all the feelings you may be experiencing, but more than anything please don't lose hope. I know the feelings of walking into the NICU and seeing your tiny baby hooked up to wires and machines. Still one thing is for sure, I know the NICU changes you for the better. This long journey will make you a better parent and a better person and one day your preemie will also turn into a feisty three-year-old. I also know that the NICU will always be a part of you. Pray, hope and believe because miracles do happen!

Love, Victor, Nicole and our miracle baby - Liam



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

Self-Care Tips for NICU Parents (continued from page 1)

- Do something for yourself each week. A walk in the park, a bubble bath or an especially long shower, a manicure, buy yourself something small but needed - like new towels or a hairbrush. Take a trip to the mall if that's something you like. Treat yourself. Literally go to a bakery or to the bakery at the grocery store and buy your favorite item and treat yourself. Buy yourself a birthday cake, cupcake, favorite cookie, etc.
- If you need mental healthcare or feel you need to speak to someone don't keep it a secret. I spoke to my OBGYN and she referred me to a therapist. Some people just need to talk to friends and family, but don't keep your feelings to yourself. You can also find a support group, people/staff in the NICU, and/or support on social media platforms
- I tried to rest at home whenever I wasn't in the NICU. It helped me feel stronger given childbirth and also allowed me to pump on schedule to bring breast milk to the baby. Long, uninterrupted showers and good meals were also helpful. I also watched light, enjoyable TV shows to try to relax my mind a bit.

Interview with Nancy Edelman, RN... (continued from page 2)

What is your favorite thing so far about working in the NICU in your new role?

Coming into a new role is always a challenge. My favorite part about returning to the NICU is being able to work alongside nurses and leadership that are still here from when I left 20 years ago. That is a true testament to the passion of those who are the foundation of this unit. Not to mention, how much I have already learned and how everyone has warmly welcomed me to the team.

Do you have any suggestions for the NICU families?

It seems to me that NICU families really benefit from connecting with each other and with their support systems. Also, while being a NICU parent is certainly a unique, unexpected and challenging experience, it can also be very rewarding and it's helpful to try to focus on the joy of being a parent and growing with your child. Your preemie will always be special and they will bring you much happiness!

Is there a personal or fun fact about you that you would be willing to share?

I am the very proud mother of a son and daughter who are grown and married. So far, I have one grandchild. She delights me every time I see her and reminds me how much life little ones bring into the home. I'm a huge country music fan and I miss going to see live shows but I have 100 or so memories and Spotify to keep me happy and dancing until we can enjoy that again.