

nicu Family News



Kangaroo Care In Action

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...

You can find complimentary baby hats, scent cloths and diaper shirts for your NICU baby in boxes in the NICU Family Library. All are made for our babies by different generous volunteer groups. If the boxes are empty or you need a different size just ask your baby's nurse to try to find what you need.

"Kangaroo Care" in the NICU

Kangaroo Care, also called skin-to-skin care, is a special way for parents to hold their baby against their bare chest. Doing Kangaroo Care has been found to have important benefits for both parents and babies.

Each May for the last five years, we have joined other hospitals in celebrating International Kangaroo Care Day by holding a two to four week-long contest in the NICU, and we will do so again this year. During this time, the nurses and parents that have the most involvement in Kangaroo Care sessions get a prize at the end of the month! This program has been a big success and helps raise staff and parent awareness about skin-to-skin care and its benefits.

Take a look at the information below and talk to your nurse about Kangaroo-ing your baby/babies today.

Did You Know...

- ...that touching or holding a baby skin-to-skin (Kangaroo Care) is one of the most comforting things parents can do for their child and no equipment can replace it?
- ...that Kangaroo Care helps babies have a more stable heartbeat and breathing pattern?
- ...that babies who are kangarooed have longer times of deep sleep? This is good because babies grow during periods of deep sleep.
- ...that Kangaroo Care has been shown to decrease the amount of time a baby spends crying?
- ...that dads can kangaroo too?
- ...that kangaroo care may help your baby control their temperature?
- ...that kangaroo care may help your baby gain weight faster?
- ...that kangaroo care may help your baby do better with breastfeeding?
- ...that kangaroo care may help you make more breast milk?
- ...that kangaroo care may help reduce the pain your baby feels during procedures?
- ...that kangaroo care helps you bond with your baby?

Interview With Stephanie Phillips-Johnson Unit Representative



Stephanie Phillips-Johnson

Q: How long have you been working at Saint Barnabas Medical Center and what is your job?

A: I have been the Unit Representative in the NICU at Saint Barnabas for the last 18 years! I am often one of the first faces families see when they come to spend time with their baby in the NICU, as I work at the desk right in the NICU Welcome Lobby. I usually work Monday through Friday from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm and sometimes on the weekend.

Q: What are your main responsibilities in this role?

A: My main responsibilities in this role are to:

- greet and orient families and visitors to the NICU. The security guard and I let them know about how to use the lockers for coats and other personal belongings along with the importance of putting their phones/electronics in a clean plastic bag each day and washing their hands.
- make discharged moms a photo ID to hang around their neck once their hospital band is removed from their wrist. We also try to make the dads their badge to hang around their neck the first or second time they come to the NICU. We make hanging ID badges for designated NICU support people as well since parents can identify up to four other people they allow to visit their baby without them there.
- answer the phones and direct calls in the NICU.
- help the NICU staff with paperwork for admissions.

Q: What do you think is the most important thing for parents and visitors to know about coming to spend time in the NICU?

A: I think scrubbing their hands very well and putting their phone/electronic device in a plastic bag is the most important, and more important than many visitors realize. Many germs are carried on our hands and cell phones and can be passed to the baby or the baby's environment. Then the sick and premature babies can get sick very easily from germs brought into the unit. Our staff works very hard to limit the numbers of people and germs coming into the unit to keep our babies as safe as possible.

Q: Anything else you would like to let parents and visitors to the NICU know?

A: Maybe just to understand that we are trying to keep all the babies safe and healthy here. If you are asked repeatedly on one day or on consecutive days for ID, it is only for the benefit of the babies. Additionally, there might be different staff working who might not know you even though you may have been on the unit for a long time. I ask that all parents and designated NICU support people wear/bring their hanging ID badge to the NICU every day and try to be patient with us.

Q: Anything else you would like to add?

A: I am glad to help. Please feel free to come to me and I will help you find answers. I may not have all the answers, but I can definitely help you find them!

Two Healthy Girls!

Six weeks into my pregnancy, I found out that I was pregnant with not just one, but two babies. It was the shock of a lifetime. My husband, David, and I were thrilled to know we would soon become parents and felt doubly blessed to be expecting twins. Unfortunately, our excitement was soon thrown a curveball. Just past the 12-week mark, during the first trimester screening, we were given great news about the health and development of "Twin A". Moments later we were given terrifying news about the condition of "Twin B." We were told to prepare for the worst and that it would only be a matter of days, if not hours, before our baby B would pass away in-utero.

I'm grateful to report, that prediction did not come true. For the remainder of the pregnancy both babies continued to be monitored very closely with weekly ultrasounds and other tests. Baby A continued along as expected while the other remained inexplicably small. The health of Baby B was always of great concern and the prognosis poor. Nevertheless, David and I were determined to stay hopeful and chose to focus on the positive.

On July 7, 2013, at 31 weeks and 6 days, our daughters Ava and Giuliana were born. I experienced spontaneous



Ava and Giuliana in the NICU and now.



pre-term labor that advanced very quickly and resulted in a successful natural and un-medicated birth. Ava arrived first weighing 3lbs, 14 oz. Giuliana arrived 7 minutes later, after just one push, weighing 2lbs, 8oz. She was diagnosed with IUGR (Intrauterine Growth Restriction), SGA (Small for Gestational Age), and microcephaly. Much to everyone's surprise, she was born with her amniotic sac still intact, which I learned was pretty rare. My awesome labor & delivery nurse told me an old wives tale that says it's a sign of good luck. Whether it's true or not, the story was greatly appreciated knowing her future was so uncertain.

That day, when my girls entered the NICU, everything changed.... for the better. We felt it was truly a place where miracles happen. For us, it became a place of hope and positivity. Amid all our fears and the initial chaos of it all, the doctors and nurses made us feel that what we were experiencing was routine, to be expected,

and treatable. We found great comfort in that. It was as if there was nothing unusual about the health of our girls that they hadn't seen and successfully treated a thousand times before, and that provided a sense of reassurance that we so desperately needed. Our girls received exceptional care and we genuinely felt they were in the best place they could possibly be. This is what helped us put our minds at ease when we left to go home every night.

Ava quickly became a typical "feeder and grower" and spent just 15 days in the NICU. We were so grateful she was healthy enough to go home, yet it was bittersweet to have Giuliana still in the NICU. We were soon thrown another curveball. Just a few days after bringing Ava home, I ended up back in the hospital for emergency surgery to remove my appendix. The

>> continues on page 4



Register and Attend the 18th Annual Miracle Walk
To Benefit the SBMC NICU

Sunday, 10/7/18

9:00 am at Verona Park

MIRACLEWALK.COM ■ 973-322-4259
FACEBOOK.COM/MIRACLEWALK

Important Phone Numbers:

- NICU
973-322-5300
- NICU Nurse Manager
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. Contacts:

Eileen Steffen, RNC
NICU Quality & Research
Coordinator
Eileen.Steffen@rwjbh.org
973-322-9485

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

Two Healthy Girls! (continued from page 1)

The bright side was that I was again living under the same roof as Giuliana. I had amazing nurses who wheeled me to the NICU for visits. Thankfully, the rest of her stay was relatively uneventful and she was able to come home after a total of 31 days, weighing exactly 4 pounds.

Giuliana was eventually diagnosed with a rare growth disorder. Luckily, it's had no effect on her cognitively or developmentally. She's being treated with growth hormone therapy and had surgery to remove her tonsils and adenoids. So far it's been a tremendous success, she's healthier than ever, and recently made it onto the growth chart for the first time ever! Ava and Giuliana are now typical four-and-a-half year olds and will be starting kindergarten in the fall! Both our girls are happy and healthy, and David and I are still feeling doubly blessed.

We are eternally grateful for the love and care our family received during our time in the SBMC NICU and participate in the Miracle Walk and the NICU Family Advisory Council to give back. Additionally, when I heard about a special project to benefit NICU families, I knew instantly I wanted to participate. The Twenty-Five and Four project was founded by a NICU graduate mom in Arizona, Amanda Huhta, whose son was born prematurely at twenty five weeks and four days gestation. During their NICU stay, she wanted to be able to dress her son but couldn't find any clothes that fit. Out of necessity, the Twenty-Five and Four diaper shirt was born! Amanda and her mom created a unique shirt designed especially for babies in the NICU. It allows for the tubes and wires and can open easily in the front and over the shoulders.

I quickly signed up to be a volunteer seamstress and began sewing hand-made diaper shirts specifically for the NICU babies at SBMC. I make shirts to fit babies of all sizes. It's a small gesture, but often it's the little things that can have a big impact. It's about hope and dignity. Every parent deserves the joy of dressing their little one, and every baby deserves a shirt that fits! If your baby is in the NICU and you would like one for them, just ask your nurse to please get you one. Or, you can see if there are any in the correct size in the NICU Family Library and feel free to take that one. If you sew and would like to help make these special shirts please contact Hayley Hirschmann, NICU Family Coordinator, at Hayley.hirschmann@rwjbh.org. She will forward me your contact information. If you'd like to find out more, visit www.twentyfiveandfour.com.



The girls holding preemie diaper shirts.

Lastly, some SBMC graduate NICU moms and I have started a Facebook group called "SBMC NICU Parents". It's a closed group where NICU grad parents can talk and share ideas and concerns. If you would like to be added, please "request to join" the group on Facebook.

-Danielle B.