

# *nicu* Family News



NICU graduate Arjun and his mom celebrate his first birthday.

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...

...doing skin to skin care with your baby in the NICU has a number of benefits for baby and is one of the most comforting things a parent can do for their child. No NICU equipment can substitute for doing skin to skin care. Talk to your nurse to see if your baby is able to do skin to skin with you (for babies born less than 32 weeks gestation, you will have to wait until after their first three days of life).

**Saint Barnabas Medical Center** | **RWJBarnabas HEALTH**

The SBMC NICU is now on Facebook  
[www.facebook.com/SBMCNICU](https://www.facebook.com/SBMCNICU) 

94 Old Short Hills Road, Livingston, NJ 07039  
 1-888-724-7123 [rwjbh.org/sbmc](http://rwjbh.org/sbmc)

## You and Your Premature Baby's Development

All babies have brains that are not yet fully developed. Time is the only thing that moves this development along. However, there are some helpful things for you to know and be sensitive to while your baby, and their brain, is developing. This is especially important if your baby was born prematurely and they have to complete a period of intense growth and development outside the womb - which is usually an environment specifically tailored to your infant's needs. There is something called neuro-protective care that you can do along with our NICU staff to try to help support your baby's developing brain. Neuro-protective care is done to promote the most optimal development possible in a NICU.

Some researchers (Altimier & Phillips, 2013) feel that the most important neuro-protective intervention may not be provided by the NICU staff but rather by involved parents since family is the "constant" in the infant's life. Unfortunately, it has been estimated that only about 5% of touch in the NICU is intended to comfort the babies. Parents are in the best position to offer ongoing nurturing touch and skin-to-skin care to offset some of the less comforting handling that is necessary for survival - especially in the smallest and sickest babies.

### Here are some things you can do to help support your premature babies developing brain:

- "Safeguard Sleep" to allow for brain development: try to interact with your baby when they are awake and more alert (and know that this alert time increases gradually with each week of gestational age).
- Provide positive touch via gentle but firm hand "hugs," do as much skin to skin holding as possible, and ask staff if you can be the second set of hands to soothe baby during cares or procedures. This is called two-person care.
- Talk to your baby before you touch them and touch them before you move them to help prepare them for both.
- Keep your voice low when speaking to others near your baby. Also, close nearby doors and drawers quietly because your baby is used to being in your belly where they were protected from loud noises.
- Talk, read and/or sing softly to your baby because your voice comforts them and helps them develop language later on.
- Try to provide breast milk for baby as breast milk for preemies is special and can help protect them from infection and help lead to better outcomes.

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## Interview With Kwanchai Chan, MD

### Neonatologist, Saint Barnabas Medical Center

**Q: How long have you been working in the NICU here and anywhere before here?**

A: I joined the NICU team here at Saint Barnabas Medical Center in January of 2019. However, I have been practicing as a neonatologist since 1999.

**Q: Where did you do your residency, training and work before here?**

A: I did my residency at Jersey City Medical Center in New Jersey and pursued the training in Neonatology at Tufts University in Massachusetts. After graduation in 1999, I returned to Thailand and practiced at Bangkok Christian Hospital until 2002. I had an opportunity to return to the United States and worked with a private practice in Dallas. In 2010, I joined the faculty at Texas Children's Hospital, Houston, to get more experience from the Academic Center. I was recruited by Children Hospital at St. Francis Hospital in Oklahoma in 2015. It has always my dream to return to New Jersey to raise my family here. When I learned that there were opportunities to work at Saint Barnabas Medical Center, I decided to move back to New Jersey.

**Q: How did you know you wanted to be a NICU doctor?**

A: When I was a second year resident, I realized that being a neonatologist is a privilege. We have an opportunity not only to save lives but we can make a big difference in their future as well.

**Q: What have you liked the most about working in this NICU so far?**

A: I am very proud of working with Dr. Kamtorn and the group here. Especially when I attended Vermont Oxford Network meeting with our group in Chicago. I realized our team has some of the best outcomes in the nation. We have very collegial relationships and a clear direction of what we are doing. The team has all the support from nursing staff, the respiratory therapists, pharmacists and ancillary services.

**Q: What does Family Centered Care mean to you?**

A: The parents trust us to take care of their precious babies. They deserve to know and understand what we are doing. To me, Family Centered Care means getting the family members involved and participating in caring for their own babies. We are always here to answer their questions. >> continues on page 4



Kwanchai Chan, MD

## Miracle Walk To Benefit the SBMC NICU

**Save-The-Date**  
**20th Annual Miracle Walk**  
**Sunday, October 11, 2020**  
**9:00 am at Verona Park**

This past October's Miracle Walk was a great success with over \$250,000 raised by more than 1,800 participants. The walk also serves as a NICU reunion for SBMC NICU staff and families. It was another great day with lots of donated food and entertainment for the kids including face painters, costumed characters and balloon artists and a DJ.

**LEARN MORE AND REGISTER: [MIRACLEWALK.COM](http://MIRACLEWALK.COM)**  
**973-322-4259 ■ [FACEBOOK.COM/MIRACLEWALK](https://FACEBOOK.COM/MIRACLEWALK)**



## Our NICU Story

“Arjun - The Warrior Prince” arrived on July 31, 2018, much ahead of his actual due date (November 5, 2019). It was our first pregnancy and everything was going smoothly until that weekend when he was very quiet in my tummy without much movement. That Monday morning I woke up with swollen and watery eyes and my husband’s immediate reaction was ‘something is not right with you.’ I calmed him down and assured him that I was fine and would get it checked at the doctor’s (I had a glucose tolerance test the same day). I went to drop him at the train station (he was working out of town then). I came back home and left for the appointment a little later. Upon my arrival at my appointment, the nurse gave me the sugary drink and while I waited for the glucose test she checked my vitals and the numbers were very high. The doctor came in and re-checked the vitals and the numbers were still very high. She then immediately drove me to the hospital and admitted me through the emergency room. I can’t thank her enough and have to say that her immediate attention saved me and my baby. I was diagnosed with severe preeclampsia.

Friends and family reached the hospital in a few hours. It was the next day when doctors decided to deliver the baby as my health was getting worse. The news came as a shock but we did not have a choice and trusted the doctors. Our tiny miracle entered this world on July 31 weighing 1 lb. 13 oz. To everyone’s surprise he cried when he came out. My mind was so blank that I was not happy nor sad at the moment. My little boy was carried over in the arms of Maria E. Sanchez-Konel, MD, with eyes half open and she had me give him a big kiss. This was the start of our NICU journey.

While my condition was stable, it took me 48 hours to gather all the strength in the world to go see my baby in the NICU. The NICU staff was patient and explained what was going on with Arjun. They insisted I rest and try to recover while they took care of him. He was fed donated breast milk while I worked hard on producing some breast milk of my own for him. With the help of nurses and lactation consultants I was able to establish a good milk supply that was enough for my baby.

When I was discharged from hospital with my baby still in the NICU, it broke my heart and was something we never imagined. But on that day I decided to overcome all my sorrow and tried to be strong for my little man because I realized that he was fighting the battle of his life. We signed up to receive daily email updates about the baby. My day used to start with that email, then a follow-up call to the NICU, and a visit to the NICU where I would spend as much time as possible, I would return home in the evening and make another follow-up call before I went to bed. Day after day, this was the routine. We celebrated Arjun’s one-month birthday in the NICU with cupcakes for the staff. I still remember our baby’s giggle when we sang happy birthday to him.

Arjun had his share of battles: low birth weight, apnea, infection, hernia, and bottle feeding difficulty, but he fought every single one with amazing courage. Through the journey we found a new family, ‘the NICU family,’ that stood by the little one and us. Finally, after 87 long days in the NICU, on October 26,



Arjun was ready to come home with us! It was mixed emotions of happiness, worry (if we could take care of him) and sadness (that we were going to miss the NICU staff). But we were given enough guidance on how to take care of baby and home we went!

Ever since the little one has been home, time has flown and before we realized it, Arjun turned into a happy, healthy one year old and we got to celebrate his first birthday with those near and dear to us. We would like to express a heartfelt thank you to all the doctors, nurses and hospital staff who were with us through this journey. We are forever grateful!

With Love  
Rajitha, Manoj, and  
Arjun (The Warrior Prince)

## 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@rwjhb.org  
973-322-9485

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

## You and Your Premature Baby's Development (continued from page 1)

- Talk to your nurse about swabbing the inside of your baby's cheek with colostrum, or early breast milk, to prepare their digestive system for later feedings and help prevent infection.
- Leave a scent circle with your scent on it to help comfort your baby when you are not able to be with them.
- Do avoid smelling like cigarettes or strong scented lotions and perfumes as they can be overwhelming to your baby's premature sensory system.
- Try to keep your baby's giraffe isolette covered to protect their eyes from bright light until about 32 weeks gestation. During that time, one side can be lifted to speak, sing or read softly to them.
- After 32 weeks, gradually increase the amount of light your baby is exposed to and around 37 weeks you can offer visual experiences as long as they don't seem to stress your baby. The human face (preferably parents' faces) are the most important source of visual stimulation. Holding your baby is great for this too!

## Interview With Kwanchai Chan, MD (continued from page 2)

### Q: Why do you think Family Centered Care is important?

A: Most parents expect to deliver healthy babies and go home within a few days after delivery. Some of the mothers blame themselves for what happened to their babies but it is not their fault. Family centered care helps parents relieve their stress, fear and guilt. It helps them bond with their babies. Babies whose parents get involved with their care during their hospital stay have better outcomes. They are more prepared and ready to take care of their babies after discharge.

### Q: What suggestions or advice do you have for NICU families generally and about being involved in their baby's care?

A: I would like to make sure all NICU moms understand that they are not the reason their babies are born sick or early. We understand that they are worried about their babies. Getting involved and spending time with their babies as much as they can, will help them and their babies. I encourage them to spend time doing skin to skin, nursing, and caring for their babies as much as possible.

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

A: I would like to express my gratitude to all of the NICU staff. Everyone is very passionate about their jobs. One of the reasons that we have such success and good outcomes at SBMC is because of the team effort and dedication from every one of us.