

Britain's first NIDCAP centre opens its doors

Staff on the Winnicott Baby Unit at St Mary's Hospital Paddington have pioneered the practice of developmental care in the UK. Now the unit has been selected to become Britain's first NIDCAP training centre, under the leadership of Inga Warren, a consultant neonatal therapist who is now the first approved NIDCAP trainer in the UK.

NIDCAP – Newborn Individualised Development Care and Assessment Programme – includes the systematic observation and interpretation of baby behaviour, which underpins care planning, shifting the emphasis away from task dominated care to focus on the individual needs of babies and families. It is a complex intervention that involves in-depth analysis of dynamic interactions between the infant, the environment and caregivers, and requires intense concentration and well-developed



perceptual and communication skills. From these observations, a detailed picture of the infant's strengths and difficulties emerges. With this information and details of the baby's history, plans are made for adapting the environment and caregiving to fit the baby's maturity and tolerance for stimulation. This baby-led approach can be integrated into all aspects of care.

The NIDCAP is a family-centred programme that offers parents support and guidance in understanding their infants' signals and goals, and in becoming confident in their infant's care.

The NIDCAP was developed by Dr Heidelise Als at Harvard Medical School. It is governed by an international board – NIDCAP Federation International – that regulates standards. The framework for NIDCAP is evidence-based and there is a growing body of research that shows health and development benefits for high risk infants and their families. Although it is a distinctive programme, it builds in ideas, principles and evidence from other models

LEFT: Supporting babies through difficult procedures is one NIDCAP strategy. This baby is so well supported she hardly notices a long line being inserted.

BELOW: Babies' responses to all aspects of care are considered including their ability to attend to and interact with caregivers.



of 'developmental care'.

Both nursing and medical staff at the Winnicott Baby Unit are actively involved in supporting the practice of NIDCAP on the unit and are convinced that it has positive effects on the well-being and development of preterm infants. Published reports show infants need less respiratory support, have fewer complications involving brain and lungs, and grow and master feeding more quickly. They spend less time in hospital and their development is improved while interaction between child and parents is also positively influenced.

In order to practise NIDCAP or any form of developmental care effectively, it is necessary for staff to undergo comprehensive training and to have the support of their nursing and medical managers. NIDCAP training is done on a part-time basis and usually requires a commitment of one to two years. Training may be conducted at the trainee's unit or on the Winnicott Baby Unit. An introductory session involves as many members of the trainee's team as possible in order to familiarise them with the concept of NIDCAP.

The first Winnicott trainees have started their NIDCAP training and Trusts in several parts of the UK have already booked all the training places for 2006.

Commenting on the effect introduction of NIDCAP practice has had at Winnicott Baby Unit, Inga Warren said: "Parents really like NIDCAP and the opportunity to be involved in their baby's care. The medical and nursing staff too are very supportive of NIDCAP once they see the benefits for the babies."

The NIDCAP Centre has been made possible by the generous support of the Winnicott Foundation, a charity supported by parents of babies on the Winnicott Baby Unit.

For more information about NIDCAP training, access www.nidcap.com or email lara.gilbert@st-marys.nhs.uk

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