

# A developmental challenge

**G**race Centre for Newborn Care at the Children's Hospital at Westmead is part of a state wide network of NICUs in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Neonates are admitted from all parts of NSW as well as the Pacific Islands for specialist care which mostly consists of newborn surgery. Over 500 infants are admitted each year, the average length of stay being 12 days. However many infants stay longer due to issues pertaining to their diagnosis and treatment, with some staying beyond the newborn period of 28 days. This presents a challenge for the staff to meet the developmental needs of the infants and their families.

Our philosophy of practice "working together with families to provide the best care for infants" was implemented along with a developmentally supportive family centred model of care. In 1998 we started along the path of NIDCAP training for the staff with a commitment from the medical

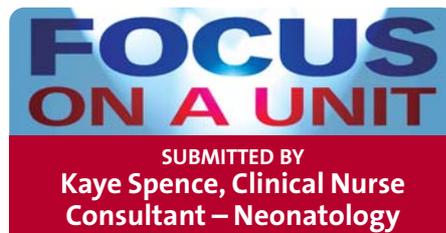
and nursing management to support the staff. Today we have two NIDCAP reliable clinical nurse specialists (CNS) and many other nurses and doctors who have undertaken various components of the training.

**Developmental support.** This role has enabled the CNS to work with staff to teach them how to interpret the infant's signals and modify their care practices to the infant's needs. It has required a change in focus from the protocol-driven practices and is now part of the staff orientation programme. A multi-professional Developmental Support Team comprising occupational therapists, physiotherapists, lactation specialist, clinical nurses and social worker work specifically with the families of longer-stay infants.

**Comfort strategy.** Another focus of care is to provide comfort and support for the babies following surgery. Pain assessment and management is a priority in the unit and staff are taught how to use an

**RIGHT:** One entry in Ella's diary reads: "Hello darling! Today you're having a dilatation. Hopefully this will make it easier for you to have a feed orally, rather than through a tube .... you've been pretty grizzly today! Maybe you're sensing what's going on."

**BELOW:** Ella was born at 35 weeks with VACTERL Association. She was transferred to the unit from Port Macquarie for a surgical repair at two days of age. Clinical manager Carol Selmei is pictured discussing Ella's feeding progress with parents Kirsty and Dwaine.



assessment tool and modify analgesia accordingly. We have introduced a nurse-initiated guideline for the use of sucrose for procedural pain and families are also being encouraged to initiate sucrose or breast feeding as part of the comfort strategy.

**Baby diaries.** One of our clinical managers introduced "baby diaries" as part of the family-centred practice. Each baby is given a diary on admission, to enable parents, families and staff to record the baby's journey through the NICU to our extended care unit. Families have told us they have used the diaries to remember their baby's journey as well as informing families of the experiences of intensive care. Language is no barrier with some entries being made in Arabic or French.

**Parent Advisory Council.** The introduction of a Parent Advisory Council was set-up with families who have had an infant in the NICU. This council is chaired by the families with an agenda put together by families and staff. To date, they have advised on research information, a parent information brochure, the signage in the nursery as well as some of the NICU practices. A representative of the parent's council also participates on the Neonatal Council as a full member along with the neonatologists, managers, consultants and other members of the healthcare team.

**Orientation of new staff.** All new staff participate in an extended orientation programme which includes introductory sessions on infant states and behaviours, care practices based on infant cues and the use of reflection in their work practices. In addition, workbooks and study guides on developmental care and the standards for developmental care in the NICU and extended care unit are provided.

Over the last eight years we have sustained a developmental approach to care with changes in the nursery environment and care practices to support our philosophy and we believe this has enhanced the care we offer infants and their families.

**Is your unit special?**

Why not contribute to our focus on a unit feature?  
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