

On camera: a visual link for Dutch parents

The neonatology department at Wilhelmina Children's Hospital, University Medical Centre Utrecht, is one of ten national centres for neonatal intensive care in The Netherlands.

It is equipped with 20 level III, eight level II and 15 medium care cots. More than 1,200 admissions a year are attended by 137 FTE medical and nursing staff.

In 1999, financial support and sponsorship had made it possible to create an internal camera connection between the neonatology and obstetric departments. Parents were very enthusiastic about the project and so it was decided to extend the service to include the internet, giving parents the opportunity to watch their baby at home, with the aim of strengthening parent-child bonding and reducing anxiety in parents. The hospital embarked on the Telebaby project, a cotside camera that streams 24-hour live video to a smartphone or PC via the internet.

Key principles behind the project were that it must be of additional value for parent and child, that it should not replace



A camera sits at the cotside, sending images to be digitised for viewing via the internet.



One of the units at Wilhelmina Children's Hospital.

the presence of parents at the cotside and that it must be safe and user-friendly.

Security company Cameramanager.com worked with nurses and ICT experts at UMC to set up the system. Using standard internet technology and with just a PC or a smartphone, it is now possible for parents who are not at the hospital to view live images of their baby. Such a service is seen as complementary to the physical presence of parents on the unit.

When parents choose to use Telebaby, it is explained at the outset that staff will decide whether and when the camera is turned on or off. Nurses and doctors are now accustomed to the presence of the cameras and turn them away during medical or nursing interventions. If parents choose, infants can be monitored continuously, regardless of how sick they are. In the event that a baby deteriorates and is likely to die, the camera is switched off and parents are called in to be with their infant.

The hospital says it did not encounter any ethical obstacles introducing the system.

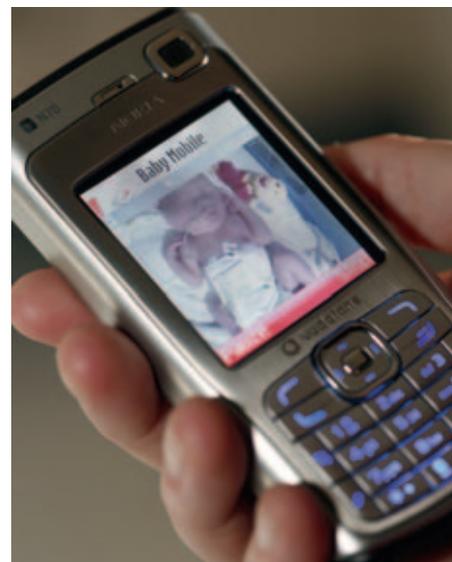
After initial teething problems with the connection of digital cameras to the internet there are now 32 cameras and 32 Telebaby streams available and the technical department at UMC Utrecht is able to carry out adjustments to the cameras, flexible arms and wiring.

Existing cameras and cables from the internal camera connection were adapted for the purpose. A camera is located by the cot and this camera is connected to the network, transmitting images to be digitised via a datacentre to view on the internet.

Parents are given a login name and password and they can decide who they pass this on to.

Telebaby was made possible by money raised by Vrienden van het WKZ, a fundraising group for the hospital, and Cameramanager.com donated 30 cameras this year. The cost per camera is around €230-240 a year, but this does not include the initial costs of the camera, wiring and flexible arms etc.

Staff have their own account on the website www.telebaby.nl, where they can see an overview of all the cameras and view the images. Here they also assign cameras to



A Smartphone enables parents to see their infant while they are away from the unit.

patients. Appointed staff manage the configuration of the cameras and can solve small problems, or assistance is available on the helpdesk at cameramanager.com.

Due to their vulnerability, cameras can become inoperative and, as there is not enough camera equipment for every cot, many parents are disappointed not to be able to use the service.

Currently, the department is working to repair the broken cameras and to increase the number of cameras to 42 so that in future each cot will have its own.

As more hospitals in The Netherlands are looking to use similar systems to Telebaby, the neonatology department at Wilhelmina Children's Hospital has been asked for information about installing the system. Meanwhile, the University Clinic for Companion Animals in Utrecht also uses the cameras, allowing owners to check in on their pets after surgery.

All in all, both parents and staff have been positive about the Telebaby project, with nursing and medical staff seeing opportunities for using it in research and education.

www.cameramanager.com

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