Primary Care Nursing in the NICU
Abstract for the NANN Conference 2012

Learning Objectives:
1) Describe the advantages of Primary Care Nursing in the NICU
2) Identify the role of Primary Care Nursing in relation to parent satisfaction.
3) Identify challenges encountered during the initiation of a Primary Care Model.

Background of the Problem: I work in a 45 bed NICU at an academic medical center. NICU patients frequently require long-term hospitalization. It has been identified that a small percentage of these patients are hospitalized in the NICU for months, without a Primary Nurse Team. The NICU has several barriers to initiating Primary Care Nursing. These include the unique population, nurses not wanting the responsibility/accountability, nurses’ fear of losing acute care skills, and nurses needing a break from long-term care.

Purpose of Practice Change: Previous research shows that babies who receive primary care have better outcomes, such as shorter length of stay, less complications, and improvement in parent/family involvement and satisfaction. The Primary Care Nurse knows the patient and family best, which may increase patient safety, quality of care, and parent satisfaction as exemplified by a family centered care model.

Supporting Research Evidence: The NICU Relationship Based Care Council and myself worked together to assess the number of babies receiving Primary Care in our NICU. We were disappointed with the results and low numbers. We then developed a survey for staff nurses about their understanding and interest in Primary Care Nursing.

Practice Change Methods: I, together with the NICU RBC Council, designed and implemented an NICU Nursing Primary Care Model. I also created a Nursing Primary Care Team card to go in the front of each bedside chart. The purpose of the card was to notify the medical team of the nurses who make up the Primary team for each patient. I wrote a “Primary Care in the NICU” introduction letter for parents to read upon admission of their infant to the NICU. This introduction letter was to increase parental awareness of the role of Primary Care Nursing for their infants. In addition, I put together a PowerPoint Presentation about Primary Care Nursing, to be utilized during orientation of newly hired NICU nurses.

Results: After implementing the new Primary Care Model, I assessed the percentage of babies receiving Primary Care, and found a large increase. Our percentage of babies receiving Primary Care has been above 75% since the model implementation. Nurses, as well as families, have also verbally voiced their satisfaction with Primary Care Nursing.

Comparison To Research: I was able to find previous research on the advantages of Primary Care Nursing and Family Centered Care. During my literature search, I was unable to find any articles related to Primary Care in the NICU and the effects of Primary Nursing on parent satisfaction. Further studies in this area are needed.
Recommendations: I recommend that all NICUs implement a Primary Care Model. We have found increased nurse and parent satisfaction on the unit.