

**A newsletter for  
Sunnybrook NICU  
families and their  
friends**

## ***In this Issue:***

- You're invited to the Premie Picnic!
- Find out what our Social Work team can do for you.
- Meet Maureen Luther and Luisa King

Something you'd like to see in the newsletter?

We would love to hear from you!

Please email ideas to Kate, the Parent Coordinator, at [kate.robson@sunnybrook.ca](mailto:kate.robson@sunnybrook.ca), or just let me know when you see me in the unit. I'm in Monday, Wednesday and Thursday or by appointment.

Thank you to Phillippa Willitts for the use of her photo.



## Welcome to Sunnybrook!

*A message for you from Graduate Families of the NICU at Sunnybrook and the Family Advisory Committee (FAC):*

We are parents of NICU babies though our stories are all very different. Some of us were in the hospital for a long time, and some for only a few weeks. Some of our children show no signs now of

their early struggles, and others have some challenges. Some of us endured losses and some had a quick and uncomplicated time with our babies in the NICU.

What we have in common is that we have all been forever changed by this experience, and we all love our children more than we ever could

have imagined. While it's important to be aware of the risks and complications that could lie ahead, it's equally important to remember that it is also possible, even probable, that life a year from now will be joyful.

**We wish the best for you and your family.**

## What can I do in the NICU?

It's so good for babies to have their parents with them, yet the prospect of spending time here can feel very daunting. How can you fill the hours? We asked some parents for suggestions.

**Kangaroo Care.** Holding babies skin-to-skin is great for them AND wonderful for parents too. Research shows it helps babies learn to breathe, soothes their stress and helps their brain develop.

**Hand Hugging.** If you can't do kangaroo care, you can still do hand-hugging where you gently cup your baby's head and feet. Ask your nurse to show you how.

**Talking to your baby.** A recent study from McGill University showed that quietly reading and singing to your babies helps you bond with them, even when they are very small. It also helps you develop

routines that you can carry from the NICU to home.

**Record Keeping.** You can also scrapbook, journal or blog; ask Kate (the parent coordinator) for help getting started. If you'd like to be here but are running into obstacles, let us know. Our team may be able to help. And remember the old saying: "The days are long but the years are short."

"At first I found it weird not wearing my wedding ring. I got a chain and wore it around my neck. Our first day home, we took a moment and put our rings on each other again. Almost like a little ceremony just with us and our baby. It made a special day even more special."  
-from Jessica, mom of 27 weeker

## Common NICU questions

Here are some questions we get a lot. Have more? Ask any member of the Sunnybrook team. We are here to help you.

- 1. What are rounds?**  
Rounds are when the medical team comes together to talk about a baby. They happen every morning and we encourage parents to be there.
- 2. Why must I take off my rings?**  
Germs can hide under rings even

after handwashing. We ask you to keep your arms bare from the elbows down to keep your baby safe.

- 3. What is a HUG blanket?**  
A small square blanket you wear to give it your scent. You then leave it with your baby who will find it comforting when you're not there. Ask your nurse, the lactation consultant or the Parent Coordinator for one.

**4. What is the Follow-up Clinic?**  
Babies who were less than 1500 grams, born at less than 30 weeks gestation or who were very ill while in the NICU will have follow-up visits with our clinic. The clinic assesses development and gets you the help you need. Therapists from the Follow-up Clinic may also visit the NICU to discuss therapeutic activities and infant development with you.

## Meet Maureen Luther!

Maureen is a member of our wonderful follow-up team. Her official job description is "paediatric physiotherapist"; for parents that means she is our go-to person for questions about development, feeding and therapeutic activities. She will see all of the graduates in

their first year in the Follow-up Clinic, but is also always available to consult with current NICU families.

Maureen says, "Those babies born preterm are amazing little people who continue to surprise and thrill us every day! With the care and support both

in the unit and in the follow-up clinic, you, as parents, can only imagine what potential these babies will achieve!"

If you'd like to meet Maureen, ask your nurse or find her in the Follow-up Clinic. Her office is RM 242.



## From a Graduate Parent

*Sandy, one of our graduate moms, says:*

"I feel like I missed out on some of those fun pregnancy moments first time moms typically have. For instance I wasn't prepared to have a

baby shower or accept gifts.

The NICU staff did what they could to help my husband and I celebrate our twins' birth. I will cherish the name cards and footprint cards the staff

made. It was these little things that helped make the experience a positive one and gave us back some of those celebratory moments that we had missed.

## Intensive Caroling: One family gives back

*Graduate parent Stefanie writes:*

"Our daughter Elsa spent 5 months in the NICU at Sunnybrook. She is now 2.5 years old and doing wonderfully well. We are grateful for the incredible care Elsa received and thought we'd love to do something special to show our gratitude. Since Elsa loves Christmas carols we organized Intensive Caroling and invited our friends and family to join us for an hour of singing. We put out

a donation box with a photo of Elsa when she was in the hospital and people gave generously. While the money we raised is important, I think it was especially important to celebrate with family and friends and acknowledge our own little miracle."



Elsa enjoys some Christmas music with family and friends

## Tips for families and friends

On the message boards in the parent hallway you'll see tips intended for your families and friends. If you'd like a copy of these to distribute, ask Kate, the parent coordinator. Here's a selection of our top tips.

### FAMILIES AND FRIENDS CAN:

- Prepare meals and help coordinate meal preparation with others.
- Drive parents back and forth to the hospital.
- Do laundry, take care of pets, mow lawns,

and shovel walkways.

- Babysit siblings; arrange for special outings and be available for last minute childcare.
- Educate yourself about prematurity, but don't feel the need to share what you're learning with the parents. Be careful about what resources you use, especially if you're researching online.
- Try not to be offended if parents exclude you temporarily. The NICU can be difficult and some people turn inwards in order to

cope.

- Respect the rules of the NICU. Don't visit if you're sick or if people close to you are sick.
- Resist the urge to compare the new baby with other babies.
- Keep offering help when the baby is home.
- When a baby goes home, remember that preemies, especially during the winter months, are at risk for infections and sickness. Never visit if you're sick
- Hugs are good too!

*My family and friends organized a meal plan for us that lasted for six months. People just dropped off meals on our porch. I was so grateful ... and very sad when it ended!  
- from Kate, the parent coordinator and mom of 2 preemies*

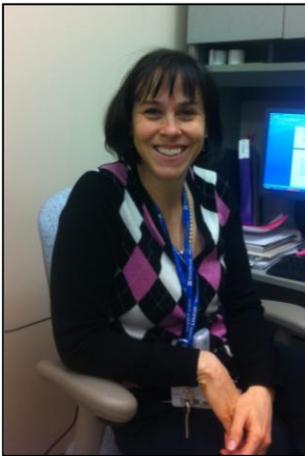
"I remain in touch with many of the mothers and consider their friendships very special. We formed a bond unique to parents who have had babies in the NICU. These friendships and the informal support they give will continue as we parent our preemies through any challenges they may face."  
- Sandy, mom of 27 week twin girls

## Talk and treats – every Thursday

Sometimes the best people to talk to during a difficult time are people who are in the same boat. Our graduate families tell us they found the support of other NICU families invaluable while they were in the hospital. And so every

Thursday from 1:30 to 3:30 we host a family get-together in the parent lounge. Sometimes we invite special guests who can answer your questions about the NICU, and sometimes we parents sit and chat amongst ourselves.

You are always welcome and please let your family members know they're welcome to drop by too (if they're healthy). One session we had 5 moms, 3 dads, one uncle and one grandma! We ate lots of cookies that day.



## Get to know ... Luisa, the Lactation Consultant

Luisa has been an NICU nurse at Sunnybrook for 22 years. 8 years ago she decided she wanted to help moms in the unit learning to breastfeed by certifying as a Lactation Consultant. She has taught prenatal classes and breastfeeding classes

at Sheridan College, and works in a community hospital as an LC in inpatient and outpatient clinics.

She wants moms to know she is their greatest cheerleader. Her purpose in the NICU, as she sees it, is to be supportive to moms in particular as

they achieve their goals in feeding and caring for their babies.

If you'd like to see her, ask your nurse to call her. Her office is M4 203 and her email is [luisa.king@sunnybrook.ca](mailto:luisa.king@sunnybrook.ca)

## Upcoming Events ...

**Valentine's Day:** For those families who are with us on February 14, please drop by the Parent Lounge any time between 1:30 and 4. We'll be hosting a Valentine's Day party for NICU families and staff.

We'll have crafting sessions so you can create keepsakes like cards or scrapbook

pages, and of course sweet treats for all to enjoy.

**A Little Opera for Little Babies:** March 19, come to a concert to benefit the wonderful Linden Fund, which raises money for Level III NICUs in Ontario. Details at [musicforpreemies.ca](http://musicforpreemies.ca)



## Save the Date: 2011 Premie Picnic is June 12!

Every year, graduate families and staff members gather together to celebrate our wonderful children. For families, it's a chance to see other parents and staff members again. For staff, it's a chance to see what these little bundles look like years later. And for the kids?

Well, it's a chance to have a picnic, enjoy yourself and get your face painted. As it should be.

This year's picnic will be from 12 to 4 pm on Sunday, June 12, in McLean House Park which is close by Sunnybrook. For updates, visit the

Sunnybrook NICU Family Advisory Committee page on Facebook. We provide food and fun stuff to do; we ask you to bring picnic blankets or lawn chairs if you like to sit. Hope to see you there!



Face painting, BBQ, bouncy castles AND ducks!? It's true!

## Social Workers: Here to help you

*My social worker helped me cut through all the red tape. I was overwhelmed by all the calls I had to make but she guided me. She offered me a shoulder to cry on when I needed it too. She was a friend in need indeed!*  
- Mina, mom of 28 week boy.

Hi Parents! Having a baby in the NICU can be a very stressful experience. You may have feelings of fear about what may happen to your baby, confusion regarding the medical information you've received, or sadness that you are not able to take your baby home at this time. It is normal to feel this way, and it can be very helpful to have

someone to talk to about those feelings. The Perinatal Social Workers are available to the parents and families of any baby admitted to our NICU for emotional support; information regarding financial issues; assistance with your maternity, parental, or sick leave benefits; referrals to other community resources; and to assist with your transition home.

Please feel free to contact any one of us to learn more.

**Jennifer Stannard**  
416-480-6100  
ext. 87940  
Office: M4-301

**Suzanne Holmes**  
416-480-6100  
ext. 87941  
Office: M4-302

**Kelly Polci**  
416-480-6100  
ext. 87942  
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## What is the Family Advisory Committee?

Part of how Sunnybrook shows its commitment to Patient and Family Centred Care is by involving parents and families in ongoing education, development and programming. Graduates of our NICU are invited to participate in our Family Advisory Committee.

At our FAC meetings, we might discuss involving graduate parents in new employee

orientations, plan events like the Premie Picnic, design new materials for NICU families like the NICU milestones project or the Sibling Handbook (created by a graduate parent), or give feedback to staff about research or other new initiatives. It's a wonderful way to stay involved with Sunnybrook after discharge and we welcome your involvement. Meetings are usually the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the

month from 6-8 in the Family Lounge. Join the Sunnybrook NICU Family Advisory Committee on Facebook and keep in the loop about meeting times and major activities.

"I still keep hand sanitizer in my coat pocket and I haven't had a cold in two years!"  
- Jen, a graduate mom of a 29 week girl.

## Cold and Flu Season in the NICU

Cold and flu season isn't fun for anyone, but it's an especially dangerous time of year for little babies. The good news is there are many things you can do to keep your babies safe. First, you can keep from getting sick in the first place by getting your flu vaccine shot. To protect your baby, who cannot receive the flu

vaccine, everyone in your family should also get the vaccine. Be rigorous about regular handwashing. Eat well, drink lots of water and take vitamin D. If you do get sick, don't come to the NICU until you are better. Don't let sick family or friends visit either. Also, if you are

pumping or breastfeeding, avoid taking cold or cough medicines that dry you up, because they'll dry up your milk too. If you ever have any questions about medications and milk, ask your nurse to call the lactation consultant.

## Kangaroo Care ... did you know?

1. Moms and dads can both do skin-to-skin holding.
2. You don't need to worry about baby getting cold. A mother's body changes in temperature depending on what baby needs.
3. Kangaroo Care gives babies a better quality of sleep, which in turn fosters growth.
4. Plan it so you can hold for long periods of time (1 hour+). Getting your baby in and out of bed isn't restful for her/him.
5. Studies show holding babies skin-to-skin protects them from infections.
6. In 2003, the World Health Organization put kangaroo care on its list of endorsed practices.
7. Other studies show kangaroo care may help the brain develop and shorten the overall length of hospital stay.



*Ohhhhh. Who is enjoying this more? Thanks to graduate mom Lauren for sharing this photo.*

### Sunnybrook NICU

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## What is Family Centred Care?

The model of care offered in the NICU at Sunnybrook is known as "Patient and Family Centred Care" (or P&FCC). It means that you and your baby/babies are at the centre of the circle of care. Families are a key part of the care team and should always be treated as

such. That is why NICU staff members make a point of telling families you are not visitors – you have a right to be here.

The core concepts of P&FCC are:

- Respect and Dignity
- Information Sharing
- Participation
- Collaboration

We want you to be a part of the team, and we will help you in whatever way we can.

To learn more about Patient and Family Centred Care, visit the Institute for Patient and Family-Centred Care at <http://ipfcc.org>.