Nurturing Families and Ourselves: The Role of a Child Life Specialist in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

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Introduction

The admission of a newborn to an intensive care nursery is highly stressful and emotionally taxing for families.1, 2 Family support activities and programs are required to facilitate coping during this difficult time.3 The Certified Child Life Specialist (CCLS) with a strong educational background in child development and family systems promotes effective coping through preparation, education, and self-expression activities of parents and siblings. While these activities are common to the role of the CCLS in the pediatric setting, what is unknown is the impact these activities have in nurturing families and supporting staff in the NICU.

Purpose

To evaluate the role of a full-time CCLS as a support to families and NICU staff.

Methods and Program Implementation

In the first 7 months post-hire, the CCLS introduced the following family and care activities:

- scrap-booking activities
- infant milestone certificates
- sibling support and play
- parent luncheons
- holiday certificates and crafts
- family social hours
- parent celebration cards
- comfort support to infants during procedures

Outcome Measures

Survey monkey was used to determine staff awareness and utilization of the CCLS role. Parent satisfaction on the P-HCAHPS (Pediatric-Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) survey was compiled quarterly. Process and outcome measures are ongoing.

Results

Twenty one % of nurse respondents identified the primary role of the CCLS was in sibling education, support & family activities. While the majority (49%) identified that non-pharmacologic support, bereavement support and sibling education, support, & family activities are all critical to the role of the CCLS in the NICU.

Conclusions/Clinical Implications

The impact of the CCLS on family support in the NICU is clear. Our findings suggest that while the nursing staff understands the role of the CCLS as well as its importance to support families, it remains underutilized as a resource. Further implementation of this program has potential for nurturing an early parent-infant bond as well as supporting NICU staff.

Selected References


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