

Neurodevelopmental supportive care in South African NICUs - an essential change of attitude

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Introduction: Preterm infants are at great risk for a variety of health and developmental problems related to their prematurity. It was determined that the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) environment was not conducive to the neuro-behavioural development of the preterm infant which led to the development of the 'developmental supportive care approach'.

Neurodevelopmental supportive care for the preterm infant is well-studied internationally but this approach seems not to be implemented in a comprehensive manner in either the private or public health sector NICUs in South Africa. Caring for a preterm infant is regarded as a specialised area and requires specialist training. The current training of the multi-disciplinary team members (MDT) seems to be too limited to provide these professionals with sufficient knowledge and skills to equip them for their work in the NICU environment.

Aim: This study investigated the current practice of neurodevelopmental supportive care in the NICU.

Methods: This study used implementation research which aimed to bridge the gap between research and practice. A multi-phase design with mixed methods was used to collect data. The study population consisted of two academic, public hospitals in Gauteng and all the MDT members providing services in the NICUs. A survey, a situational analysis, a 'training-needs-and-subject-matter-fit' assessment as well as an 'organisational readiness for change' assessment were conducted.

Results: The MDT's training needs, related to neurodevelopmental supportive care and their readiness for change was established. Implications for improving preterm infant care through the training of the multi-disciplinary team will be discussed.