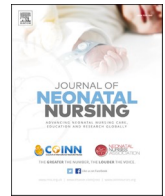


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## Including a parental perspective in neonatal education

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### ABSTRACT

Post registration neonatal education in England is currently delivered in a number of settings including Higher Education Institutes and clinical areas and is currently being reviewed in relation to setting a national standard by Health Education England (NHS, 2022). Neonatal courses require constant updating to ensure that they reflect changes in clinical practice and use the most up to date evidence base. A recent example of evidence based clinical innovation is Family Integrated Care. This article will focus on how including a parental perspective within a post registration neonatal nursing course delivered by a Higher Education Institute can support the integration of Family Integrated Care within neonatal education.

Family Integrated Care is a vital component of neonatal care, this needs to be mirrored within neonatal nurse education. Hearing a parent's perspective enables us to understand their requirements and experiences, this promotes improvements in neonatal care. Parental perspectives can be incorporated into education using a variety of methods that are suitable to both the student and parental requirements. Incorporating a parent's perspective is valuable for both the parents and the students. The impact on student knowledge is essential for their future roles.

### 1. Introduction

Post registration neonatal education in England is currently delivered in a number of settings including Higher Education Institutes and clinical areas and is currently being reviewed in relation to setting a national standard by Health Education England (NHS, 2022). Neonatal courses require constant updating to ensure that they reflect changes in clinical practice and use the most up to date evidence base. A recent example of evidence based clinical innovation is Family Integrated Care. This article will focus on how including a parental perspective within a post registration neonatal nursing course delivered by a Higher Education Institute can support the integration of Family Integrated Care within neonatal education.

### 2. Parental perspectives of Family Integrated Care

Family Integrated Care (FICare) is a model of neonatal care which promotes a culture of partnership between families and staff; enabling and empowering parents to become confident, knowledgeable, and independent primary caregivers (BAPM, 2021). There are a number of improved outcomes associated with FICare including improved infant feeding, growth and parental mental wellbeing (Waddington et al., 2021). Successful implementation of FICare requires changes in staff

attitudes and behaviours to focus on improved communication with the use of sensitive and appropriate language (Waddington et al., 2021). This evidence base is still building as FICare is still a relatively new concept in the UK. This emphasises the importance of including parental perspectives in education to ensure that we are learning and teaching in line with the growing evidence base.

FICare is a vital component of neonatal care and education, the underpinning theory is taught by experienced care co-ordinations. Nevertheless, to give students a greater insight family involvement can be used by including parental perspectives within teaching sessions. Listening to parents using a variety of methods including, qualitative research, parental feedback and hearing a parent's perspective enables us to understand their requirements and experiences. These requirements can include communication methods, financial issues, confidence and mental health and wellbeing. This provides a different insight into FICare and one which highlights individual experiences and outcomes. Which in turn helps to widen the perspective of staff to provide a more holistic approach to FICare and promotes both professional development and improvements in neonatal care (BAPM, 2021).

### 3. Integrating parental perspectives into neonatal education

Parental perspectives can be incorporated into education using a

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variety of methods that are suitable to both the students and parental requirements. Incorporating a parent's perspective is valuable for both the parents and the students. Parental involvement is key in all aspects and stages of neonatal care and therefore their involvement in neonatal education is essential. The impact on student knowledge is crucial for their future roles and professional development.

At Birmingham City University parental perspectives have been encompassed in the post registration Neonatal Critical Care Pathway in several sessions using a variety of methods. These include face to face sessions on campus, pre-recorded stories, parental quotes and stories from the Bliss website. They have been incorporated into a variety of sessions including bereavement, breaking bad news, term babies, asphyxia, Retinopathy of Prematurity and Family Integrated Care. This is to ensure that a parent's perspective is incorporated into the whole curriculum and to share a variation of parental experiences to enhance the students understanding.

Parents were approached via email to request their participation; some did not respond but those that did were keen to share their story. Parents were also asked to provide written consent to enable their recorded stories to be shared in future sessions. Prior to Covid-19 a parent did attend face-to-face sessions, unfortunately due to family commitments they were unable to continue. Likewise, those parents approached would have liked to attend in person but due to work commitments were unable to. This is totally understandable and therefore the recordings carried out via Microsoft Teams have been vital for the inclusion of parental perspectives to continue.

These parental perspectives vary from 5 to 45 minutes long and all have their own unique value and enrich student learning. There is an initial workload when recording parental stories, however with parental permission these recordings can be used several times and will therefore benefit a larger number of students without the parents having to keep repeating their story. Having this variety of perspectives is vital to encompass a number of different experiences, thoughts and cultures to reflect the diverse nature of neonatal care provision.

The way that the parental perspectives are included differs in each session, some are a free-flowing recording, others are more structured where parents answer questions provided to them in advance of the recording. Providing the parents with appropriate information and options in advance is key, some prefer just to tell their story, others prefer to have structure and be guided by questions in advance.

A number of parents have been involved to provide their experience, these include charity founders, colleagues and acquaintances who have had a baby requiring neonatal care. All of the parents involved are keen to share their story to enhance the education of neonatal nurses. The parents involved have reported that they are keen to support neonatal education and feel that by sharing their story they will enable neonatal nurses to recognise how important their role is and identify that the actions that they can take to help families and support them whilst they are going through a traumatic time.

To improve the inclusion of parental perspectives in the future it would be ideal to have a parent attending either face-face or live stream via teams. This would enable students to ask real-time questions, consideration of the diverse needs of the students is also crucial as a recent study by [Atwa et al. \(2022\)](#) report that students do prefer face-to-face learning in certain circumstances.

When including a parental perspective, it is also important to incorporate diversity into these experiences, especially as we know from [MBRACE \(2021\)](#) that maternal and neonatal outcomes are worse for Black and Asian ethnic groups and deprived populations. It is vital to ensure that fathers are included as it is important to hear and value their experience, it has been recognised that fathers have reported severe psychological symptoms following NICU discharge ([Shaw et al., 2009](#)). Fathers make unique and important contributions to the development of their infant and they often feel that they have a limited role to play in their infant's care, surveys suggest that they are not typically involved in the care of their infant, fathers do want to be involved, and their lack of

involvement is an important source of stress ([Feeley et al., 2013](#)). [Burgess and Goldman \(2022\)](#) recommend that fathers need to be seen as an integral part of the family unit and not an 'add-on'; the workforce needs adequate training to include fathers in all of their work and this should be incorporated into their initial professional training at universities so that working with both parents becomes part of the norm. By ensuring that fathers perspectives are included in neonatal education this provokes discussion into the significant role of fathers and provides a greater understanding of their role and feelings, this knowledge has the potential to enhance the involvement of fathers within neonatal care and improve their outcomes.

#### 4. The impact on students

The impact on students' knowledge is both individual and valuable to their future professional development. Student feedback was gathered informally after the session and via module evaluations. Post registration students on the Neonatal Critical Care Pathway report that these parental perspectives are insightful and enlightening. Post course evaluations highlight that 90% of students feel that the inclusion of the parent's perspectives supported their learning. They have gained understanding of parent's emotions and feelings and how parents process some actions and information. This has the potential to have an impact on the care that they provide in the future. It also provides them with an insight into the long-term impact of neonatal care on the whole family. This knowledge and understanding will support the expansion of FICare within Neonatal Units. Empathetic, family centred teaching and learning is enabled when students understand the emotional experience from the parent's perspective ([Petty et al., 2019](#)). To measure the ongoing impact of these sessions' module evaluations will be reviewed to assess whether they still provide value.

It is also important for students to learn from parents that it's the little things that they can do that can have a huge, long-lasting impact on the family. This not only empowers the students but also reinforces to them that the care that they provide to families does make a difference and will have a lasting impact on them. It is vital that nurses understand the effect of their actions or words no matter how small. Having a baby admitted to Neonatal Intensive Care is very anxiety inducing, neonatal nurses have a key role in supporting parents and in developing strategies and interventions to support parents and decrease the stress of their experience, these interventions include the perceived little things including chatting with parents ([Al Maghaireh et al., 2016](#)). Both the inclusion of parental perspectives in education and the use of FICare in practice have benefits for neonatal staff, empowering them to lead change in their unit and contributing to happy, cohesive teams ([Kirolos et al., 2021](#)). Including parental perspectives in education enhances this empowerment to lead change as it provides students with a greater understanding of their actions and parental requirements.

#### 5. Conclusion

In a clinical setting it can be difficult to gain a parent's perspective due to lack of resources and the environment. Being able to listen to a parent's perspective during education gives the students time to hear the parents story and to reflect on the information received. This time for reflection is very valuable. Reflection enables self-awareness, which can then lead to potential transformational change and knowledge generation to inform future experiences ([Clarke, 2021](#)). As we are aware successful implementation of FICare requires a change in culture ([Waddington et al., 2021](#)), this time for reflection and increased awareness of parental experiences has the potential to support this transformational change.

Parental engagement is key within all aspects of neonatal care, and this includes neonatal nurse education. Research is required to explore the use and impact of parental perspectives in both pre and post registration nursing courses across England.

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