Breastfeeding in the NICU

Becoming a mother, mothers’ experiences, and helpful interventions

Robin C. Murtha, RN, C-PNP, APN, IBCLC
Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital
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Providing Mother’s Own Milk in the Context of the NICU: A Paradoxical Experience

Objectives

- Define the process of maternal role attainment, becoming a mother.
- Describe how a high risk pregnancy and/or a NICU admission changes the process of becoming a mother.
- Review current studies of mothers’ pumping and breastfeeding experiences in the NICU.
- Discuss interventions to help mothers provide their milk and breastfeed in the NICU.

Becoming a mother

Maternal Role Attainment
R. Rubin, 1967
- Maternal role is a complex, cognitive and social process which is learned, reciprocal and interactive.
- Behaviors used
  - mimicry
  - role play
  - fantasy
  - introjection, projection, rejection
  - grief

Becoming a Mother
R. Mercer, 2004
- Commitment, attachment, and preparation (pregnancy)
- Acquaintance, learning, and physical restoration (2-6 weeks postpartum)
- Moving toward a new normal (2 weeks to 4 months)
- Achievement of a new maternal identity (around 4 months)

Acquaintance, learning, and physical restoration (birth through first 2-6 weeks postpartum)

Becoming a Mother
R. Mercer, 2004

Moving toward a new normal (2 weeks to 4 months)

Becoming a Mother
R. Mercer, 2004

Achievement of maternal identity (around 4 months)
The process of becoming a mother becomes disrupted with a high risk pregnancy.

This process of becoming a mother becomes disrupted with a NICU admission.
Expectant Moms are imagining this

No one imagines their baby could be here

No one imagines their baby could look like this
How does having a high risk pregnancy and/or expressing breast milk and breastfeeding, in the NICU setting, play a role in this process of becoming a mother?

Maternal Role Alteration in the NICU

Maternal Role Alteration in the NICU
Mothers’ Experiences of Having a Preterm Infant in the Neonatal Care Unit: A Meta-Synthesis

Mother–Baby Relationship: From Their Baby to My Baby


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Maternal Development: A Striving to be a Real Normal Mother


Mothers’ Experiences of Having a Preterm Infant in the Neonatal Care Unit: A Meta-Synthesis

A Turbulent Neonatal Environment: From Foreground to Background

Mothers’ Experiences of Having a Preterm Infant in the Neonatal Care Unit: A Meta-Synthesis

Maternal Care giving and Role Reclaiming Strategies: From Silent Vigilance to Advocacy


Mothers’ Experiences of Having a Preterm Infant in the Neonatal Care Unit: A Meta-Synthesis

Mother-Nurse Relationship: From Continuously Answering Questions through Chatting to Sharing of Knowledge


Mothers’ Experiences of Having a Preterm Infant in the Neonatal Care Unit: A Meta-Synthesis

“One evident finding in this meta-synthesis is that mothering a preterm infant in the neonatal care unit is a developmental process that is nurtured through close relationships with the baby, professional relationship with the staff, and the internal vigilance and concern of the mother.”

What’s in the literature about the maternal role/experience of expressing breast milk and breastfeeding in the NICU?

Advice concerning breastfeeding from mothers of infants admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit

- Advice to NICU nurses on the facilitation of breastfeeding:
  - Physical environment
  - Privacy
  - Transportation to the NICU was a barrier
  - Psychosocial environment
  - Advice given to all mothers creatively and as possible; nurses be proactive
  - Mothers, not nurses, should feed baby

- Advice to other mothers
  - Take it easy; do not give up
  - Contact with baby
  - Breastfeed as soon as and as often as possible
  - Ask the staff for advice and help

- Advice to NICU nurses on the facilitation of breastfeeding:
  - Take care of and feed baby yourself
  - Take care of and feed baby yourself
  - Use a breast pump to express milk
  - Get help with transportation
  - Feed your baby on demand


Advice concerning breastfeeding from mothers of infants admitted to a neonatal intensive care unit

Mothers considered it a major nurse role function to encourage parents to enter their new role by facilitating undisturbed parent/infant contact and active parent participation in the infant’s care and feeding.

The rewards outweigh the efforts: Breastfeeding outcomes for mothers of preterm infants

The rewards

- Healthiest nutrition
- Enhancing mother-infant closeness
- Perceiving infant contentment and tranquility during breastfeeding
- Providing convenience for the mother
- Giving the mother a tangible claim on the infant

The efforts

- Loss of control and predictability
- Inconveniences; leaking breasts, breast discomfort, exclusion of certain foods from diet
- Mothers who only breastfed in private felt tied down.
- The efforts were a combination of new motherhood and breastfeeding


Expressed breast milk as ‘connection’ and its influence on the construction of ‘motherhood’ for mothers of preterm infants

- Breast milk as connection
- Subthemes
  - Breastfeeding is initially not a priority
  - ‘Being a good parent’
  - ‘So much is taken out of your hands’
  - ‘You have to do it’


Breastfeeding is initially not a priority

- Watching baby
- Recovering from birth

"...because I didn’t have Joel with me, you don’t have the nurses and all the people kind of giving you all this information, they’re dealing, you know, with the breastfeeding issue [s] with the women whose babies are right next to them. Me without having my baby, I didn’t have, like, the nurses coming in and having chats to me, you know, they just showed me the machine, what I had to do and that was the end of it, you know. ...But, yeah, the whole breastfeeding thing wasn’t a priority or a major issue because my baby wasn’t with me.”


Being a ‘good’ parent

- Breastfeeding is part of being a good parent
- Best for baby

Breastfeeding as a marker of ‘good’ motherhood

- Providing breast milk or breastfeeding is an integral part of motherhood
- A mother’s job
- Inherited role of having a baby

So much is taken out of your hands
• Providing breast milk is a way of being connected despite separation
• Objectification of expressed breast milk

'You have to do it' - expressing is not a choice
2 parts: pumping then breastfeeding
Task of pumping a burden

Expressed breast milk as 'connection' and its influence on the construction of 'motherhood' for mothers of preterm infants

Positive
• Sense of connectedness
• Sense of motherhood
• Most active way to participate in care

Negative
• Feelings of sadness and separateness
• Filling a void in the maternal experience
• Necessary step before breast feeding
• Mother's job that rested solely with mom
Providing mother’s own milk in the context of the NICU: A paradoxical experience

• Becoming a mother interrupted
• A paradoxical experience
• Negotiating


Becoming a Mother-Interrupted

“It’s so incremental and it’s nothing you do it just increases that way ... It’s just those little things that just increases the bond and makes it an incremental journey in terms of establishing it.”

A paradoxical experience

- Separation versus connection
- Pump versus baby
- Pump: detachment from infant versus importance
- Extended pumping requires tremendous effort and commitment

“It’s not like waking up to a baby and having the baby there or anything. It’s just going up and hooking yourself onto a machine and not being able to see your babies because they are in the hospital and it’s just stressful.”


Negotiating

- Developing pumping strategies
  - 1 set of pump attachments
  - Distraction while pumping
  - Where to pump
    - Hospital versus home
    - Back to work
  - Achieving milk release
  - Suction settings
  - Routines

“Recognizing the interrupted process of becoming a mother following the birth of a very preterm infant and the journey required to attain motherhood provides clinicians with a different lens with which to view these mothers. Providing an environment that places the mother in a strategic position as a vital member of the caregiver team from the very moment of the infant’s admission to the NICU will allow a more nurturing atmosphere to facilitate the briefest of interruptions in the process of becoming a mother.” p. 371


“I have faith in my milk”:
The meaning of milk for mothers of very low birth weight infants hospitalized in the neonatal intensive care unit.

"I have faith in my milk":
The meaning of milk for mothers of very low birth weight infants hospitalized in the neonatal intensive care unit.

"The experiences of these mothers reflect the importance of acknowledging mothers’ faith in the healing properties of their milk as a motivating factor for sustaining lactation while coping with the stress and anxiety inherent during their infants’ NICU hospitalization."


Interventions to help mothers provide their milk and breastfeed in the NICU.

Helpful Interventions

- We have 2 simultaneous developmental processes occurring:
  - Becoming a mother
  - Infant development
...mothering a preterm infant in the neonatal care unit is a developmental process that is nurtured through:

- close relationships with the baby
- professional relationship with the staff
- internal vigilance and concern of the mother

Nurturing close relationships with the baby

- Privacy
- Let mother care for baby
- Have physical contact with baby
- Skin to skin
- Breastfeeding if able
- Get started pumping early

Professional relationship with staff

- Nursing and medical staff be proactive
- Ask nurses and medical staff for help
- Avoid discontinuation of breast milk
- Remember the NICU is a foreign environment to the mother; help her
- Give more practical tips to make pumping easier
- Reassurance, calm, chat
### Developing maternal self-efficacy for feeding preterm babies in the neonatal unit

#### Affect /physiology

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<td>- Facilitate physical contact</td>
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<td>- Encourage KC</td>
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<td>- Support milk expression, breastfeeding</td>
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<td>- Provide pain relief</td>
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<td>- Reassure, calm</td>
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<td>- Encourage/demonstrate calm</td>
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#### Mastery

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<td>- Use motivational techniques when ambivalent</td>
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<td>- Assess Mom’s commitment, offer support accordingly</td>
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<td>- Provide information consistently: health benefits, factors affecting milk production, consistency</td>
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<td>- Assess skill, repeat</td>
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<td>- Praise attempts, relate baby’s progress to mother’s involvement</td>
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#### Modeling/persuasion

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<td>- Introduce to successful NICU breast feeder</td>
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<td>- Encourage peer support</td>
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<td>- Normalize experience</td>
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<td>- Good communication, consistent advice</td>
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<td>- Transfer control from staff to mother</td>
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<td>- Involve partner in feeding decisions,</td>
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Most important...... Enjoyment!

Enjoyment