Nov 17th, 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

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Nicki Kory
nicole.kory1@gmail.com

Gabriele Fredian
gabrielefredian@gmail.com

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Kory, Nicki and Fredian, Gabriele, "Incorporating Family Centered Care in the NICU: An Integrative Literature Review" (2017). Grace Peterson Nursing Research Colloquium. 9.
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Incorporating Family Centered Care in the NICU: An Integrative Review of the Literature
Gabriele Fredian & Nicki Kory, DePaul University School of Nursing

BACKGROUND
Infants who are hospitalized in the NICU for an extended period of time, and their parents, may suffer from a delay in parent-infant attachment, and parents may complain that they don’t feel anything toward their babies. Since the experience in the NICU can greatly affect the outcomes of both the parents’ health and the infants’ health, it is vital that nurses create an environment that is healthy, productive, and centered around the family. This would lead to benefits for both the patient and family, as well as the care team. This concept is known as family-centered care, or FCC.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this literature review is to explore the way nurses approach and execute FCC in the NICU. The proposed study specifically examines FCC interventions that nurses can implement in the NICU. The knowledge gained from this literature review will provide the basis for incorporating FCC into nursing education, thereby promoting better health outcomes and ensuring efficiency in the NICU.

Research Question:
How do NICU nurses effectively implement FCC in their clinical practice?

METHODS
A meta-synthesis literature review was conducted to analyze what FCC interventions nurses effectively incorporate into their practice. All searches were limited to primary sources from peer-reviewed journal articles that were published in the past 10 years in English. All articles were in the NICU setting and incorporated nurses. Articles that centered on FCC in other settings and literature reviews were excluded. Research was analyzed through the viewpoint of Peplau’s theoretical model of Interpersonal Relations in Nursing. Peplau’s theory is based on the idea that nursing is a process, involving a mutual relationship between the nurse and the patient that is rooted in working toward a goal. FCC facilitates establishes trust and a therapeutic relationship, helping the nurse and family unit advance through four stages to effectively meet the set goal.

FINDINGS
Encouraging parent-specific practices: NICU nurses should encourage and facilitate parents and siblings to participate in kangaroo care, scrapbooking, education groups, parent-to-parent support and to be involved in the care of the patient. Nurses should also provide materials, space, time, and assistance to parents so that their time in the NICU is productive for all members of the family.

Nurse-Parent Relationships: The nurse needs to consider the family part of the patient’s care team. This involves establishing a therapeutic relationship, incorporating shared problem solving, and using cautious guidance when the parents are providing care for their infant. The nurse should also schedule specific times the family will be caring for the infant, and always allow access for visitation to help ensure that parents see their babies.

Specific Practices: The nurse should use an individualized approach to providing care in the NICU. The parent’s risk of stressors should be evaluated, and the nurse should implement care for the parents. Nurses should strive to move from the role of caregiver to the role of being a facilitator, where they partner with the physicians and parents. Nurses should increase their capacity to communicate infant observations to parents, listen to the parents’ individual remarks, and allow them to voice questions and concerns. Parents should be integrated into the care throughout the infant’s stay. The nurse can also play the parents’ preferred music in the NICU to decrease stress, as it can positively influence the environment of the unit, quality of care, and the infants’ cardiac and respiratory function. If the family is unable to be there, the nurse should provide alternative communication methods such as Skype or Facetime.

DISCUSSION
The major finding of this review is that there are numerous evidence-based ways for nurses to effectively implement family centered care in the NICU. Kangaroo care was the most mentioned FCC intervention for nurses to facilitate. Guidance, education and assistance were proven as effective implementations of FCC. Nurses can also create a welcoming space for parents by offering them places to nap, support groups to engage in, and music to choose from. Ultimately, the best way the nurse can provide FCC in the NICU is to allow the parents to take control of their baby’s care.

NURSING IMPLICATIONS
• Facilitate Kangaroo Care
• Encourage parental control over care of infant
• Assess parent risk factors
• Provide breaks and a place to nap
• Take an individualized approach to each family
• Play parents’ preferred music
• Offer the ability to Skype or Facetime if parents cannot be present

CONCLUSIONS
A potential limitation of this literature review is the incorporation of studies across all sample sizes and countries. This may affect the validity of findings as country and culture specific research could be further analyzed for differences. In addition, more studies are needed to outline newer FCC practices. Future direction for this research would be to define specific FCC practices based on different cultures and religions. Continued research can focus on what others on the care team, hospital administrators, and staff can do to assist nurses in effectively implementing FCC. This research would further advance FCC implementation and improve quality of care.

Contact: gabrielefredian@gmail.com and nicole.kory1@gmail.com