

Midwifery and Neonatal Nursing

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Extremely preterm infant skin care: A transformation of practice aimed to prevent harm.

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Background: The skin of extremely preterm infants is underdeveloped and has poor barrier function. Skin maintenance interventions initiated in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) have immediate and lifelong implications when the potential for infection, allergen sensitization, and altered aesthetic outcomes. In addition, the high level medical needs of extremely preterm infants demand skin level medical interventions that too often results in unintended skin harm.

Purpose: We describe the use of a harms prevention, or consequence-centered, approach to skin care which facilitates safer practice for extremely premature infants.

Method: Neonatal and pediatric Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) came together for monthly meetings to review the evidence around best skin care practices for extremely preterm infants, with an emphasis on reduction of skin harm. Findings were focused on the population of interest and clinical implementation strategies.

Findings: Skin care for extremely preterm infants remains overlooked by current literature. However, clinical practice pearls were extracted and applied in a manner that promotes safer skin care practices in the NICU. Implications for

Practice: Gentle adhesives, such as silicone tapes and hydrogel backed electrodes can help to reduce medical adhesive related skin injuries. Diaper wipes are not appropriate for use among extremely preterm infants, as many ingredients may contain potential allergens. Skin cleansers should be pH neutral to the skin and the prophylactic use of petrolatum based emollients should be avoided.

Implications for Research: Further exploration and understanding of skin care practices that examine issues of true risk versus hypothetical risk of harm.

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