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Promoting oral feeding readiness with milk drops

Background: The NICU infant often receives necessary invasive medical procedures that may have a negative impact on the oral sensory and oral motor functioning of the premature infant. The transition from gavage feedings is often challenging, while the infants stay in the NICU learning to breast or bottle feed.

Purpose: To determine if there would be a difference in the length of stay (LOS) between premature infants who received milk drops with gavage feedings and those who did not receive milk drops.

Methods: The subjects were NICU infants born at 23 to 33+6 weeks gestational age. A convenience sample of 99 infants who received milk drops was matched, on gender and gestational age only, with a convenience sample of 99 infants who did not receive milk drops.

Results: The premature infants who received milk drops with gavage feedings had a significantly shorter LOS and significantly less average adjusted costs than those who did not receive milk drops.

Implications for practice: The intervention of giving milk drops with gavage feedings is a simple, no expense intervention that allows the premature infant enjoyable oral experiences associated with feedings. Nurses and parents easily learned to administer the milk drops and assess the infant's response and acceptance.

Implications for research: A replication of this study with a larger sample of infants would add validity to these findings. Evaluation of post-discharge outcomes may further determine the efficacy of this intervention.

Biography

Barb O'Rourke has been a Neonatal Intensive Care Nurse for over 29 years at Blank Children's Hospital in Des Moines, IA. She has been involved with several feeding initiatives for her unit including Elevated Side Lying Bottle feeding, SOFFI training, and a member of the original research team that developed the Milk Drops Research Project. Barb is a mother to four grown children and grandmother to 5. She enjoys going on walks, date nights, and snuggling up with the grandchildren to watch Moana again and again.

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Cindy Butler has served as a staff nurse in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Blank Children's Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa for the past 25 years. In other words, Cindy feeds a lot of high risk babies. Cindy has conducted original research on the benefits of offering oral milk drops as a pleasurable experience to infants who are too immature to accept oral feedings. The Milk Drops Research Project received the 2017 award for Innovations in Patient Care from the Iowa Association of Nurse Leaders. In her spare time, Cindy enjoys bicycling and gardening.

Notes: