



Caring For the Late Preterm Infant

How does your program stack up?

There is a lot of “buzz” about the late preterm infant. AWHONN, ACOG, ACNM, NANN and AAP have all addressed this newer focus for maternity care. Most maternity units have brought about some changes, whether it be more stringent policies and procedures for induction and scheduled cesarean section or new nursery and NICU protocols for newborns born between 34 and 36 completed weeks of gestation. A few policy changes are simply not enough. To be truly effective across the spectrum of care, a comprehensive approach is necessary to review the many needs of nursing staff, physicians, parents, and the late preterm infants. In order for these small patients to receive the best care available everyone involved in their care must comprehend the impact of their early birth.

If you are a manager who simply introduced some policy changes to keep up with these changes, it is a good time to step back and take a closer look at the big picture. Yes, the policies needed to be changed, but do your nurses and other care providers understand the reasons why the policies changed? A few questions to consider:

- Have all your nursing staff completed a competency/guided learning process about the late preterm infant?
- Has the medical staff/APN completed competency as well?
- Has patient education changed in your unit? Is the information available for patients with low literacy and for limited and non- English speaking patients?
- Have the ancillary service providers been educated on these patients’ needs?
- Are any support services or education provided post-discharge?
- Are the physicians/nurses/social workers etc. aware of the services available for this patient population?

A Late Preterm Taskforce or committee could be developed to identify the needs of your maternity unit and patient population. Taskforce/committee members could begin with a needs assessment and develop a comprehensive educational plan and ways to improve care. Social services, Pediatric Physical

Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Lactation, Nursery, NICU, Postpartum, Labor and Delivery Nurses, Neonatology, and Childbirth Education should all be represented.

Several tools are available for professionals to utilize. March of Dimes has information available to prevent preterm birth. AWHONN has created the "Late Preterm Assessment Guide". This is very helpful for nursery professionals to determine the specific and unique care needs of infants born late preterm. This guide is available for purchase at AWHONN.org. Lamaze.org lists guidelines for induction and scheduled cesarean sections. "Caring for Your Late Preterm Infant" is a patient teaching DVD available at Together With Baby, Inc. to send home with your patient. Parents may view this DVD in the hospital and take it home for future reference. The use of this DVD will standardize your patient teaching for the late preterm infant.

Considering hosting a lecture series or a "Mommy and Me" class for parents of the late preterm infant. Over the course of the first year of life, these babies have special needs; parents would benefit from a source of continued education and being with other parents that are experiencing similar problems and needs. Lectures and programs featuring a Pediatric Physical Therapist, Occupational therapist, Speech Therapist and Social Worker to discuss the issues and topics of interest for the first year of life. Information provided by a Lactation Consultant and Pediatrician would also be of benefit in either of these settings.

Most Health care professionals caring for women and infants are aware and provided the initial steps to prevent late preterm births and care for the Late Preterm Infant. Take your program to the next level to ensure the brightest future for these special babies.