

Self Archive Note:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article:

Clarke P. Family-centred care right from birth: the irreplaceable birthday cuddle. Acta Paediatr. 2017 Sep;106(9):1534-1535. doi: 10.1111/apa.13946. Epub 2017 Jul 4.

which has been published in final form at <https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.13946>.

This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions.

Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Version

This self-archived submitted and accepted version may be used on the following terms:

Non-Commercial Use

For non-commercial and non-promotional research and private study purposes individual users may view, print, download and copy self-archived articles, as well as text and data mine the content under the following conditions:

- The authors' moral rights are not compromised. These rights include the right of "paternity" (the right for the author to be identified as such, also known as "attribution") and "integrity" (the right for the author not to have the work altered in such a way that the author's reputation or integrity may be damaged). All reuse must be fully attributed
- Where content in the article is identified as belonging to a third party, it is the obligation of the user to ensure that any reuse complies with the copyright policies of the owner of that content
- This self-archived content may not be re-published verbatim in whole or in part, whether or not for commercial purposes, in print or online. This restriction does not apply to use of quotations with appropriate citation, or text and data mining provided that the mining output is restricted to short excerpts of text and data and excludes images (unless further consent is obtained from Wiley).

Disclaimer

Self-archived articles posted to repositories or websites are without warranty from Wiley of any kind, either express or implied, including, but not limited to, warranties of merchantability, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement. To the fullest extent permitted by law Wiley disclaims all liability for any loss or damage arising out of, or in connection, with the use of or inability to use the content.

BRIEF REPORT:

TITLE: Family-centred care right from birth: the irreplaceable birthday cuddle

AUTHOR:

Paul Clarke¹ MD FRCPCH MRCP(UK)

AFFILIATION:

1. Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Jenny Lind Children's Hospital, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Norwich, NR4 7UY, UK

Correspondence to:

Dr P Clarke, Consultant Neonatologist, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Norfolk & Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Norwich, NR4 7UY, UK.

Email: paul.clarke@nnuh.nhs.uk

Tel: 01603 286337

Fax: 01603 287584

Jack, twin 2, was born vaginally at 23+1 weeks' gestation, 576 g. In good condition, despite no antenatal steroids, he was intubated and given surfactant at 3 minutes. After initial stabilisation, the resuscitaire was switched to the portable oxygen cylinder and moved alongside his mother's bed. Jack was then transferred into his mother's arms, still connected to the resuscitaire ventilator system. She was then able to cuddle him for 10-15 minutes while still being ventilated by the attendant neonatologist (**Figure 1**). During this time first family photographs were taken and first parental kisses given.



Figure 1: Jack's precious first cuddle with parents in the delivery room, aged ~30 minutes postnatal. Jack is within a polythene bag, swaddled, and the attendant neonatologist is providing manual ventilation via the endotracheal tube using T-piece with hosing still connected to the resuscitaire ventilator system. On admission to the NICU at 41 minutes postnatal, his temperature was 38.0°C, pH 7.38, and glucose 2.4 mmol/L.

Jack succumbed to late-onset sepsis on day 11 postnatal.

In the words of Emma, mother of Jack and his surviving co-twin Charlie (a now-11-year-old happy lad):

“A cuddle is so important...being able to hold Jack right after birth meant the world to me and was so special, it is the hardest thing in the world not having your baby near you after delivery and you hold on to that one cuddle you've had!

“I held Jack again when he died (he died in my arms) as I couldn't bear the thought of him being alone and it was one of the hardest things I've ever done in my life although I will never regret it as I'd never have forgiven myself if I hadn't done it!

“I didn't get to hold Charlie right after birth as I was still in labour with Jack and it was many weeks before I got my first cuddle with him - that was so hard, your maternal instincts kick in and you yearn to hold your baby. The first time I held Charlie I literally sobbed!”

Family-centred care should start right from birth, even – nay *especially* – for the most extremely preterm infants, those most likely to be ‘incarcerated’ in incubators and ‘shackled’ to equipment for weeks, precluding early parental cuddles within the NICU, while at the highest risk of dying.

Presently, it would appear that parents of very preterm infants are not routinely allowed to hold their newborns in the delivery room.^{1,2} In our experience, early parental cuddles may be offered safely to even the most extreme preterm babies requiring intensive care, through assiduous monitoring by the attendant neonatologist (now including SaO₂ monitoring). NICU admission is delayed by only minutes, and without compromise to the baby, but the first cuddle is of inestimable worth to parents.

Potentially avoidable, therefore, is the very first parental cuddle being heartbreakingly but inevitably delayed for many weeks;¹ the disaster of the first parental cuddle being offered *only* when their baby is about to die; or - worst for all - the unexpected sudden, solitary death of a baby within a NICU incubator without having ever received *any* parental cuddle during life.

Wherever possible, all parents of all preterm babies should be given the chance to hold them in the delivery room following initial stabilisation, rather than see them routinely 'whisked away' to the NICU after the merest brief showing. The birth day first cuddle is irreplaceable! Our aim should be to make delivery room cuddles the norm rather than the exception.

"The cuddle I had with Jack when he was born meant so much and all mums should have this opportunity."

References

[1] Arnold L, Sawyer A, Rabe H, et al. Parents' first moments with their very preterm babies: a qualitative study. *BMJ Open*. 2013;3(4). pii: e002487. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2012-002487.

[2] Baylis R, Ewald U, Gradin M, et al. First-time events between parents and preterm infants are affected by the designs and routines of neonatal intensive care units. *Acta Paediatr*. 2014;103:1045-52. doi: 10.1111/apa.12719.

Acknowledgements: The author is grateful to his nursing and midwifery colleagues for their support, and sincerely thanks the parents for allowing their photograph and experiences to be shared. This contribution is dedicated to Jack's memory.