

## Paper Session C4: New Initiatives in Health Promotion

### *Everyday Nursing Practice Values in the NICU and Their Reflection on Breastfeeding Promotion*

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**Purpose:** To examine NICU nurses' everyday practice values and explore how breastfeeding promotion fits within this context.

**Background:** Breastfeeding is especially beneficial for high risk infants, but breastfeeding and breast milk feeding rates are low for NICU babies. NICU nurses can play vital roles in breastfeeding outcomes, but more research is needed about how to integrate breastfeeding promotion into the realities of NICU care.

**Methods:** An ethnographic approach was utilized with participant observation and interviewing over a 14-month period in a Level IV pediatric hospital in the northeastern USA. General informants consisted of 114 purposively selected NICU nurses. From this group, 18 nurses served as key informants. There was an average of 13 interactions with each key informant and 3.5 with each general informant. Audio taped interviews and observational field notes were gathered for descriptions of everyday values and practices. Data were coded and analyzed for recurring patterns. NUD\*IST aided data management, retrieval, and analysis.

**Findings:** Nurses faced daily challenges trying to "save" fragile babies. Uncertainty emerged as a central concern underlying everyday practice values. Three themes described these values: 1. Maximizing babies' potentials in the midst of uncertainty; 2. Relying on the sisterhood of NICU nurses to deal with uncertainty; 3. Confronting uncertainty through tight control of actions, reliance on technology and maximal efficiency in use of time. While these practice values were helpful in confronting uncertainty within the cultural context of the NICU, they were in varying degrees of conflict with ongoing nursing efforts to promote the mother/baby process of breastfeeding.

**Conclusions and Implications:** Ways of dealing with uncertainty during everyday nursing care in the NICU were reflected in nurses' approach to breastfeeding. To protect, promote, and support breastfeeding in this Level IV NICU, nursing interventions must specifically address NICU nursing values for control, technology, and time efficiency.