

Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program

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In Guilford County each day approximately 15 new babies go home from the hospital with their parents. This joyous event can also be accompanied with a vast array of challenges, concerns and questions. Parents often surround themselves with the latest baby care books in hopes that the answer to any problem that may arise can be located in a moment's notice. Unfortunately, the questions and concerns of the new or even experienced parent are often too complex for a textbook answer. Parents want and need a personal touch to get them and their babies off to a healthy start. The Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program provides that personal touch with a specially trained registered nurse assigned to mom as soon as she leaves the hospital. This nurse is not only available at a moment's notice by phone but can accommodate most needs with an in-home visit within 24 hours. Mom and baby can get a medical assessment along with education, guidance and support without leaving the comfort of home, or even their pajamas.

The Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program, implemented by the Guilford County Department of Public Health and funded by Smart Start's Guilford County Partnership for Children, is unique in that it is the ONLY program in our community offering this type of in-

home care to parents and their new babies. Doctors may no longer make house calls...but these nurses do!

The benefits of the Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program to parents, babies and our community include improved coping skills for postpartum depression; success in breastfeeding for a longer period of time; improved access to services, medical care and other resources; less child abuse and neglect; lead poisoning prevention; an increase in properly immunized children; and lower rates of SIDS and infant death.

In the four years that the Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program has been offered, the number of families choosing to participate in the program has grown. Pediatricians are recognizing the benefit of the in-home care and are referring patients to the program for assistance with issues not requiring an office visit (i.e. weight checks, education and breastfeeding concerns). Six month follow up surveys, progress reports and personal stories of participants indicate the following:

- 51% of moms who participate in the program are still breastfeeding at six month as compared to the national average of 22%.
- 96% of infants in the program are properly immunized at the age of six months. This can only be compared to the 2004 NIS findings indicating only 77.8% of NC children aged 19-35 months properly immunized.
- 34% of families request and receive referrals to community services specific to their needs identified during the home visit.
- 232 cases of urgent medical need were found by the nurse during the home visit with follow up to assure the medical care was acquired.
- 98% of the families visited have established a primary health care provider for their child.

- Families receiving services from the program have often said they don't know what they would have done without "their nurse."
- Families request and receive on average of two visits from the nurse.

One story indicating the impact of this program involves a mother with postpartum depression (PPD) which affects 50-80% of all women after delivery. This mother was fine at the initial visit but suffering severe PPD when the nurse returned for a second visit one week later. The mom cried throughout the entire visit and had no interest in bonding with the baby. She was feeling overwhelmed by the baby, discouraged with breastfeeding and unsupported by the baby's father. She was embarrassed about her feelings and did not want to share them with anyone. The nurse was able to help her open up and voice her concerns and fears. Together, they created a plan which included a visit to her doctor that very day for medication, and registration to attend the "Feelings After Birth" classes at the hospital starting the following day. The mother later told the nurse "without you there would have been no one to turn to." This story could have had a very different outcome without the nurse's follow-up visit and personable approach to helping the mother.

This program ensures that ALL families in Guilford County have access to in-home care following delivery. Visits (3-5 days post-delivery with follow-up visits as indicated) include a physical assessment of mother and baby, a psychosocial assessment of the family and environment, referral and follow-up of identified needs/risks and educational counseling.

The Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program, offered to non-Medicaid families, complements the BabyLove Program for Medicaid-eligible babies, making everyone in Guilford County eligible for a home visit. In 2004, the two programs combined provided 4,407 families with at least one home visit from the nurse (80% of all deliveries) with a total of 7,275 visits. In

2001, when the program first began for non-Medicaid deliveries, only 61% of families were accepting the invitation to participate in the program. As the program has established its reputation as a valuable resource, it is more widely accepted and the numbers of participants has grown. The total number of newborns visited since the combined program began through June 2005 is 16,751.

Currently, the Guilford County Department of Public Health employs ten registered nurses and two interpreters to provide the home visits. The nurses are specially trained with experience in public health, perinatal nursing and lactation support.

“We cannot seek or attain health, wealth, learning, justice or kindness in general. Action is always specific, concrete, individualized, unique.” (Benjamin Jowett)

The Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program is not only a unique program in our community but is uniquely structured to fulfill the specific needs of each family visited. Parents of newborns have numerous concerns and questions merely due to human nature and love of the child. All parents have questions; some have dire need...many do not know who to turn to. It is certain that all families have need, however the urgency of home visits can be prioritized if needed with the following individuals getting top priority: firstborns, nursing mothers, non-English speakers, teens, uninsured, no prenatal cares, low birthweights, premies or other at-risk infants. Needs identified by the home visiting nurse can vary from minor issues such as inadequate weight gain for baby to major issues such as inadequate housing and food. The home visiting nurses come prepared to assess and address any issue at hand. An individualized plan can be created to provide the support, education and resources needed by the family. The Universal Newborn Home Visiting Program is invaluable to the families of our community.