

Dominican Hospital NICN Article

A quiet hush pervades the softly lit neonatal intensive care nursery (NICN) at Dominican Hospital. Around the peaceful room, moms are cuddling and feeding their tiny bundles; some are reaching into incubators with special gloves to touch their newborns. Nurses are at hand to offer immediate help when necessary, but are careful not to intrude on the delicate privacy of bonding between mother and baby. "Here, our nurses have extraordinary dedication," says Salem Magarian, MD, Co-director of Maternal-Child Health Services and Medical Director of the Pediatric Clinic at Dominican. "Our NICN allows parental involvement, which results in faster recovery, better outcomes and a smoother transition to the home," he adds.

Just a couple of years ago, this early bonding between moms and their premature or very sick babies so close to home was not possible. Mothers had to endure daily trips over the often-hazardous route between Santa Cruz and Stanford to visit their babies being treated at Lucile Salter Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford – sometimes for as long as several weeks.

Now, though, thanks to collaboration between the two hospitals, the great majority of the special newborns and their parents won't have to endure such hardships. Through a model developed by Dr. Magarian and Stanford, Dominican now has a full-time Stanford neonatologist – Magdy Ismael, MD – on board, supported by a Stanford neonatologist group.

As the only California Children's Services (CCS) certified nursery in Santa Cruz County, says Dr. Magarian, Dominican now has a nursery that will be able to care for approximately 80 percent of babies who would have been transported out of the county previously. "This is an intensive care extension of our family-centered birth center," he says.

Through education and case reviews with Stanford over the past two years, Dominican has been able to take increasingly acute cases with excellent outcomes. Now that they can treat most sick or premature conditions (except those needing significant neonatal surgery or those born with extreme prematurity), having a neonatologist on board assures that many more Santa Cruz County babies can be treated at Dominican rather than having to be transported to Stanford.

Dr. Magarian credits Dominican Medical Staff's keeping up to date with new techniques and the nursing staff's increased training and certification for enabling Dominican's NICN to treat more acute cases. NICN nurse Jana Kohler, who initiated Dominican's neonatal advanced life support program (ALS), says that ALS training ensures that the nurse at the bedside can provide life-saving procedures in the event a pediatrician cannot be present at the birth.

In addition to providing life-saving care, the NICN arrangement means that recovering mothers are just a few doors away from their babies at

Dominican, rather than 60 miles away. "Even if a mom can't walk, a nurse can take her in a wheelchair to visit her baby," she says.

Both Dr. Magarian and Dr. Ismael stress the critical role teamwork plays in the establishment of a state-of-the-art NICU. They plan to continue to work closely with obstetricians, pediatricians and nurses to develop educational and clinical programs that produce excellent outcomes.

"My goal is to set a good foundation for teamwork and to address all needs of obstetricians and pediatricians who have neonatal needs for specialist opinion and care," says Dr. Ismael. "We want to give the best service to the Santa Cruz County community."

Dr. Magarian says the partnership between Dominican and Stanford benefits everyone involved. "Stanford and Dominican both have world-class neonatal involvement and quality standards, and parents and babies have the convenience of getting the best care in their own community," he says.