Reducing total time of parent-baby separation on a neonatal unit: Using excellence reporting to enable culture change

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The challenge

Admitting full term babies should be an exception. Every admission for respiratory support avoided would save at least 2 days of separation as well as reduce antibiotic use.

The impact of separation is clear on speaking to families who have been through this, as seen in this story from a colleague who became one of our families on the unit:

Our patient story of separation:

The role of excellence reporting

We utilised excellence reporting as a QI tool, hoping that positively reinforcing behaviours which would enable our projects success would create better team buy in than punishing undesirable behaviours and actions.

We positively reported each attempted use of our pathway, regardless of outcome. There was no negative reporting.

Change ideas

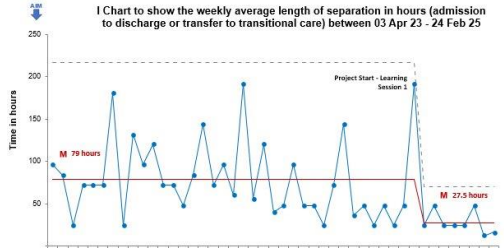
learning from excellence

The underlying hypothesis was that many newborns in respiratory distress were in a period of transition. We instituted a policy of active observation whilst proned during the first hour of life, in the hopes of avoiding respiratory intervention for some of these newborns.

As this required staff to avoid 'jumping in' to early treatment, we positively reported each 'prone alone' attempt both as method of data collection and as positive reinforcement.

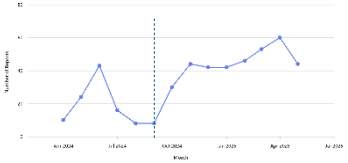
Results

Our weekly average separation time decreased from our long-term average of 79 hours, to 27.5 hours, and around 75% of 'prone alone' babies avoided any admission.



Spread of excellence reporting

The use of excellence reporting for this project led to a spillover effect which saw greater reporting across the trust due to increased awareness.



Challenges and learning

- Capturing the non-existence of intervention was a data challenge requiring a new reporting system
- Praising positive examples created a positive atmosphere around the project and team pride
- Influencing a longstanding culture of early intervention requires you to address team dynamics and psychology

Sustainability and next steps

Expansion of LfE as QI tool across trust

Offer 'prone alone' at maternal bedside using new incubators

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