

In preterm infants born before 34 weeks gestation, does use of a pacifier improve oral feeding and decrease the time spent in the NICU ?

Introduction

In New Zealand premature birth rates are increasing annually by 2.1% (Health Quality and Safety Commission New Zealand, 2012). Many influences such as women waiting longer to have families, teenage pregnancy, fertility advances such as IVF leading to multiple births and the earlier detections of problems are believed to be reasoning to the continuing rise (Neergaard, 2012).

Summary of the Literature

- Non-nutritive sucking is a rhythmical sucking activity on a stimulus that does not deliver any nutritional benefits. This stimulus could be the infants own fingers or hand or a pacifier.
- Pacifier use can be very beneficial in the first months of life, especially when the baby is born prematurely (Sexton & Natale, 2009).
- There was a common thread throughout the articles stating how the pacifier strengthens an infant's suck which allows them to feed orally faster, gain weight and be discharged almost a week earlier than those who don't use pacifiers (Standley, Cassidy, Grant, Cevasco, Szuch, Nguyen, Walworth, Procelli, Jarred & Adams, 2010).
- There were no negatives proven from pacifier use in the articles apart from a possibility of sucking unwillingness while transitioning to breast feeding (Pinelli & Symington, 2005).

Conclusion

The literature determined that pacifiers do benefit preterm infants in the NICU. They work in way which develops the infant's oromotor development, help gain weight and transfer to oral feeds faster, which all lead to an earlier discharge from hospital. It is important for nurses to be aware of these factors when educating their patient's parents when gaining their consent, so they can make a fully informed decision.

Critical Issue

While on a placement in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), many of the interventions offered to the babies had to have consent gained by their parents. One of these interventions was the use of a pacifier. Most parents did consent but some didn't. I didn't see what the push was to implement pacifiers and the more I researched the more knowledge I got about the benefits of pacifiers. So I wanted to do a literature review on this as I think nurses need more knowledge on this intervention so they can better educate their patient's parents to enable them to make a fully informed decision



Implications for Nurses

- The goal is for the infant to be discharged as soon as possible.
- Implementation of the use of pacifiers on preterm infants to fast forward the transition from tube feeds to oral feeds.
- Nurses need to be knowledgeable and understand the evidence based literature to educate the parents so they are able to make a well informed decision.
- Keep up to date with the different types of non-nutritive sucking beneficial for premature infants.

References

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