

CUDDLER PROGRAM: A RE-VISIT

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BACKGROUND

The University Medical Center Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) has begun implementing the Eat, Sleep, Console (ESC) protocol for infants experiencing Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS). To ensure the success of this program, UMC employs a team of multidisciplinary practitioners and adopts a multimodal sensory approach that will include the cuddler program. The revival of the cuddler program is an essential component to the ESC and NOWS program.

PURPOSE

The aim of this proposal is to undertake a clinical project to redefine the existing cuddler program. Our goal is to streamline the cuddler program by identifying areas for development, from establishing guidelines to standardizing orientation processes.

METHODS

A systematic review of the existing cuddler program will be conducted to clarify role definitions, establish guidelines for requirements, and set expectations for training. Documentation was reviewed about the cuddler program here at UMC and found limited information about the process. We then worked with our volunteer services director for the selection of volunteers, setting criteria and training process. Occupational therapy provided input about the neurosensory approach for addressing NOWS. Provided structure for training process of the each cuddler. Lastly, there was collaboration with NICU Unit-Based Council to ensure there is interdisciplinary input.

How to Become a Cuddler

Apply as a volunteer at UMC website
[UMC Hospital - UMC Hospital | How to Become a Volunteer](#)



WebEx Interview with Eve Olivero (Patient Experience Manager)



If selected, complete the volunteer onboarding requirements



CUDDLER ORIENTATION

- Introduction to the NICU Manager, Charge Nurse, and Staff
- Scrubbing and hand hygiene practices
- Ensure compliance with bare elbows policy
- Environmental orientation of the NICU, Preemie Patch, 6th floor Nursery, and Transitional Nursery, as well as the clean utility/supply room and milk prep room
- Introduction to the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) and their roles
- Review of the DO's and DON'Ts for cuddling
- Collaboration with the Charge Nurse to identify infants who will benefit from the cuddler program, including:
 1. Infants with Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS) or Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)
 2. Infants who have been on higher doses of sedation and are being weaned off medication and now showings signs and symptoms of withdrawal.
 3. Larger infants

RESULTS

Benefits for Babies

- Helps regulate vital signs and reduce stress
- Improves pain tolerance and sleep
- Increase immune function and promote weight gain
- Enhanced brain and social development
- Shorter hospital stay

Benefits for Families and Hospital Staff

- Provides emotional support and peace of mind for families
- Provides helping hand for the staff

Benefits for Cuddlers

- Provides rewarding experience
- Provides sense of peace and fulfillment

CONCLUSIONS

The Cuddler Program has demonstrated effectiveness and shown significant benefits. It has garnered interest from the public and experienced growth. We are conducting ongoing assessments following the revitalization of our cuddler program.

REFERENCES

