

Enhancing Compassionate Care in the NICU: A Reflection on Communication and Bias
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FCCT Webinar, 3.13.25

Key Objectives:

1. Recognize the unique challenges faced by NICU families, particularly those from underrepresented communities, and how these challenges impact their overall experience and needs.
2. Examine the role of compassion and effective communication in delivering high-quality, family-centered care in the NICU.
3. Identify two forms of bias in healthcare and demonstrate how these biases can influence communication with NICU families, ultimately affecting the quality of care provided.
4. Introduce a practical tool and corrective strategy to help identify and correct bias in real time and foster culturally sensitive, trust-building communication with diverse NICU families.

Key Concepts:

1. **Compassion is Action:**
 - a. Compassion isn't just about feeling empathy; it requires proactive steps to alleviate the suffering of others.
 - b. In the NICU, this means actively listening to families, offering clear and compassionate communication, and making efforts to understand their unique challenges and concerns.
2. **The Power of Communication:**
 - a. Words have the power to build trust or to inadvertently cause harm. Phrases like "You need to be strong for your baby" or "Your baby is a fighter" may seem supportive, but can be misinterpreted, leading to parents feeling dismissed or isolated.
 - b. **Tips for Good Communication:**
 - i. Be Present: Listen without interrupting and give families your full attention.
 - ii. Use Open-Ended Questions: Encourage families to share their concerns by asking, "How can we support you today?"
 - iii. Check for Understanding: After explaining medical procedures or updates, ask families, "Does that make sense?" to ensure clarity.
 - iv.
3. **Addressing Bias in the NICU:**
 - a. **Implicit Bias:** Unconscious stereotypes or assumptions based on race, culture, or socioeconomic background.
 - b. **Confirmation Bias:** Seeking out or interpreting information in ways that confirm pre-existing beliefs, potentially influencing how care is provided.
 - c. **Examples:**
 - i. **Implicit Bias:** Assuming a family is less involved in their baby's care due to socioeconomic status or language barriers.
 - ii. **Confirmation Bias:** Misinterpreting a missed hospital visit as a sign that the parents are disengaged, reinforcing assumptions about the family's commitment.
4. **P.A.U.S.E. to C.A.R.E. (& Care to Pause):** Regular self-reflection is key to identifying biases that may impact care. By being mindful of the assumptions we carry, we can offer more equitable, compassionate care to every family.

P.A.U.S.E. Framework for Recognizing & Correcting Bias :

1. **P** – Pay attention to your initial reactions and assumptions.
2. **A** – Acknowledge your assumptions and consider where they come from.
3. **U** – Understand your perspective by reflecting on past experiences and influences.
4. **S** – Seek different perspectives & reframe to challenge biases and broaden your understanding.
5. **E** – Examine your options & redirect your response, adjust your approach to ensure fair, compassionate care.

C.A.R.E. Framework for Delivering Compassionate Care:

1. **Continuous Self-Reflection:** Regularly assess how personal biases might impact interactions with families.
2. **Ask for Feedback:** Invite input from families and colleagues to improve communication and care.
3. **Respect Cultural Differences:** Practice culturally sensitive care by learning about families' diverse backgrounds and traditions.
4. **Engage Mindfully:** Pause in moments of stress to ensure your responses remain patient- and family-centered, without bias.

Self-Reflection and Improvement:

1. Reflect on Your Own Practice:

- a. Think back to a recent interaction with a NICU family: Were there any assumptions made based on their background, language, or behavior?
- b. Did these assumptions affect how you communicated or delivered care?
- c. How did the family respond to your communication? Was there any sign of misunderstanding or distress?

Write down your thoughts here:

2. Ways to Improve:

- a. Use open-ended questions to understand a family's needs and concerns better.
- b. Practice active listening by repeating or paraphrasing what the family has shared to ensure understanding.
- c. Seek feedback from peers or mentors on how you communicate and consider cultural competency training to improve understanding of diverse families.
- d. Regularly check your biases by pausing to reflect on whether assumptions might be influencing your care or communication.

Which one will you try today?

Remember: this may be your 100th NICU baby, but this may be this family's first experience.

“By practicing continuous reflection, enhancing communication, and addressing biases, we can create a more compassionate and equitable NICU experience for every family.” - Dr. Jess

*****Resources and readings listed on last slides of related presentation*****