

“From Uncertainty to Empowerment”: A Quality Improvement Initiative to Strengthen Family-Centered Neonatal Care at Th -Badulla Nicu Using the Empathic-N Framework

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Introduction - Admission of newborns to the NICU can be an emotionally distressing experience for families, particularly for mothers of preterm or low birth weight infants. Structured parental education, daily communication, and promotion of Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) have been shown to reduce parental anxiety, foster bonding, and improve care outcomes. This Quality Improvement (QI) project, conducted at Teaching Hospital Badulla, aimed to enhance parental satisfaction and involvement through a structured education and communication model guided by the EMPATHIC-N framework

Objectives - To improve parental satisfaction and confidence in neonatal care through daily structured education and promotion of early KMC, measured using a simplified EMPATHIC-N tool.

Methods - A pre-post intervention study was conducted at TH Badulla NICU over six months. In September–October 2023, a baseline assessment was conducted among 85 postnatal mothers with babies admitted to NICU. A structured parental education program was implemented in November–December 2023, including daily teaching sessions on hygiene, danger signs, and newborn care. KMC was promoted as a core component of parental involvement. Staff received communication training. Post-intervention assessment was conducted in January–February 2024 among 80 mothers using a translated 10-item short-form EMPATHIC-N questionnaire.

Results - KMC initiation in stable infants within 48 hours increased from 47% at baseline to 86% post-intervention. Daily updates were documented in 93% of infant records. Mean parental satisfaction scores improved from 3.1 to 4.6 on a 5-point Likert scale, with 95% of mothers reporting feeling more informed, confident, and emotionally connected to their infant’s care.

Discussion - This structured, culturally tailored QI initiative successfully enhanced parental engagement and satisfaction in NICU care. The EMPATHIC-N framework provided a practical, parent-centered measure to guide and assess improvement. This low-cost, replicable model has the potential to be scaled across other regional NICUs to promote safe, family-centered care.

Keywords - Parental Satisfaction, Structured Education, Kangaroo Mother Care, EMPATHIC-N Tool