



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESENCE OF PARENTS DURING NEONATAL HOSPITALIZATION

IMPORTÂNCIA DA PRESENÇA DOS PAIS DURANTE O INTERNAMENTO NEONATAL  
IMPORTANCIA DE LA PRESENCIA DE LOS PADRES DURANTE EL INTERNAMIENTO NEONATAL

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ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to verify the knowledge of parents about the importance of their presence during the hospitalization of children in the neonatal intensive care unit. **Method:** this is a qualitative, descriptive study, involving 20 parents from semi-structured interviews and analyzed through the technique of Content Analysis in the Thematic Analysis modality. **Results:** it was evidenced that the parents understand that their presences collaborate to recover the health of the child, reducing the time of hospitalization. **Conclusion:** it was shown the health education carried out by the professionals an excellent strategy that served to educate and sensitize the parents about the importance of their presence during the hospitalization, making them co-responsible for the care for the child. **Descriptors:** Newborn; Hospitalization; Neonatal Intensive Care Units; Parents; Mothers; Health education.

RESUMO

**Objetivo:** averiguar o conhecimento de pais e mães sobre a importância das suas presenças durante o internamento de filhos na UTI neonatal. **Método:** trata-se de estudo qualitativo, descritivo, envolvendo 20 pais a partir de entrevistas semiestruturadas e analisadas por meio da técnica de Análise Conteúdo na modalidade Análise Temática. **Resultados:** evidenciou-se que os pais compreendem que suas presenças colaboram para a recuperação da saúde do filho, diminuindo o tempo de internação. **Conclusão:** mostrou-se a educação em saúde realizada pelos profissionais uma excelente estratégia que serviu para instruir e sensibilizar os genitores quanto à importância das suas presenças durante o internamento, tornando-lhes corresponsáveis pelos cuidados voltados ao filho. **Descritores:** Recém-Nascido; Hospitalização; Unidades de Terapia Intensiva Neonatal; Pais; Mães; Educação em Saúde.

RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** averiguar el conocimiento de padres y madres sobre la importancia de sus presencias durante el internamiento de hijos en la UTI neonatal. **Método:** se trata de estudio cualitativo, descriptivo, involucrando a 20 padres a partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas y analizadas por medio de la técnica de Análisis Contenido en la modalidad Análisis Temático. **Resultados:** se evidenció que los padres comprenden que sus presencias colaboran para la recuperación de la salud del hijo, disminuyendo el tiempo de internación. **Conclusión:** se mostró la educación en salud realizada por los profesionales una excelente estrategia que sirvió para instruir y sensibilizar a los genitores en cuanto a la importancia de sus presencias durante el internamiento, haciéndoles corresponsables por los cuidados dirigidos al hijo. **Descritores:** Recién Nacido; hospitalización; Unidades de Cuidado Intensivo Neonatal; Padres; Madres; Educación en Salud.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is understood that the birth of a child is a unique and special occasion for most families. It is known that the gestational period, the preparation for the arrival of the newborn (NB), the anxiety for the first contact and the discharge of both are moments that arouse a variation of emotions for the parents; in addition, it is an event that transforms and restructures the life of the parents.<sup>1</sup>

It is of the utmost importance that the NB receives comprehensive and qualified care, aiming at the promotion, prevention and rehabilitation of its health, since it is considered a period of vulnerability due to the biological and socioeconomic risks to which they are exposed, contributing to the reduction of the infant mortality rate.<sup>2</sup>

In this perspective, the lack of follow-up of pregnancy in prenatal care, complications during gestation, a planned cesarean section and a premature birth are interurrences that may arise and provide the need for the baby's hospitalization in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).<sup>3</sup> During the hospitalization of the NB in the NICU, there is a rupture of the bond between parents and newborn due to early separation due to clinical instability.<sup>3</sup>

It is reported that the most frequent causes of hospitalization in NICUs are prematurity, respiratory problems and neonatal infection.<sup>4</sup> It is also important to note that low birth weight and prematurity, common in underdeveloped countries, are among the neonatal risk factors that contribute to the morbidity of this group, in addition to interfering with health status indicators and collaborating with the increase of hospitalization rate and neonatal mortality.<sup>5</sup>

In the face of the situation of hospitalization of the newborn, the parents are overwhelmed by their feelings of incapacity and impotence because they can not provide the child with the ideal care during pregnancy. Due to this impossibility of giving complete care, mainly, the formation of the bond between mother and child, which can contribute to reduce the self-esteem of the same, and may have, as a consequence, the precipitation of depressive symptoms.<sup>6-7</sup>

It is proven by studies that the presence of parents during the hospitalization of the baby in the NICU and their participation in the care of the child, that this participation contributes to the reestablishment of health, reduces the stress generated by the exposure of the NB to the hospital environment and facilitates the development of the affective bond between them, allowing the improvement of the care.<sup>2</sup>

The interest in developing a study in this theme was developed by the development of the practices of Nursing in Child and Adolescent Health Care, which enabled the most direct contact with the NBs,

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providing the observation of the affective bond between mother and child soon after the birth and awakening the interest in understanding the reality before the need of the baby's hospitalization in a NICU.

The study was based on this perspective, considering the importance of studying the maternal and paternal universe during the period of neonatal hospitalization, by the following questions: "What is the knowledge of the parents about the importance of their presence during hospitalization in the neonatal ICU? "; "What are the difficulties faced by these parents during the period of hospitalization of the neonate in the NICU?".

The objective of this study was to find out the knowledge of parents about the importance of their presence during the hospitalization of children in the neonatal intensive care unit.

This is a relevant study, since it seeks to contribute to the academic literature, serving as a theoretical contribution to future actions in the care of mothers and fathers who have their newborn infant hospitalized in a NICU.

## OBJECTIVE

- To verify the knowledge of parents about the importance of their presence during the hospitalization of children in the neonatal intensive care unit.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative, descriptive study in a maternity hospital that includes a NICU located in the municipality of Jequié, Bahia, Brazil. As participants, ten mothers and ten parents of newborns hospitalized in said NICU were enrolled. Subjects were selected considering the inclusion criteria: parents with children hospitalized at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and who had physical and emotional conditions to respond to the interview, who were 18 years of age or older and who agreed to participate voluntarily in the research.

The data was produced during the months of February, March and April of 2018 through a semi-structured interview guided by a form containing objective questions to obtain characterization data of the participants and subjective questions to obtain data about the object of study. Here are the questions: "What did you feel when you received the news of your child's need for hospitalization?"; "What difficulties did you face when visiting your child for the first time?"; "Do you consider your presence important during the period of your child's hospitalization?"; "Why?".

Interviews were conducted individually, in a reserved place, after the signing of the Free and Informed Consent Term (FICT), digitally recording them and transcribing them *ipsis litteris* to ensure a

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reliable transcription of the participants' reports, each interview lasting about 20 minutes.

Data was analyzed using the Content Analysis technique. In the first phase, a floating reading was carried out in order to allow contact with the subjects' answers and to know the text. The material was then organized and explored, then establishing the coding of the interviews, the participants being represented by "alphanumeric denominations" and numbered according to the order of the interview. They were withdrawn at that moment after several readings, words, sentences or paragraphs of the text that presented coherence with the objectives of the study and allowed to delineate the first grouped ideas.<sup>8</sup>

In the last phase, the units of meaning were regrouped, after readings and re-readings, allowing to highlight the categories: Feelings of parents when receiving news of their child's hospitalization at the NICU; Absence of difficulties reported by fathers and mothers during the period of hospitalization of the newborn and Perception of fathers and mothers as to the importance of their presence during the hospitalization of their child.

The study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of the Southwest of Bahia, obtaining a favorable opinion for the accomplishment of the research under opinion n° 2,450,665 and CAAE: 80930217.0.0000.0055.

Parental participants were assigned to protect their identity, alphanumeric denominations from P01 to P10 and mother participants, from M01 to M10, in parentheses, at the end of each citation.

## RESULTS

It is reported that the reasons for the hospitalization of the neonate in the NICU, according to information collected during the interview, were prematurity, totaling 17 cases; respiratory problems, in two cases, and one did not have the cause clarified. It was verified, on the profession/occupation, that four are students, three carry out household activities and 13, some paid activity.

The categories described by the material collected through the interview with the parents of premature newborns hospitalized in an intensive care unit were constructed.

### ◆ Feelings of parents when receiving the news of the hospitalization of their child in the NICU

In this category, the participants reported feelings of sadness and despair about the impossibility of being discharged from hospital due to having to leave their child in the hospital, and the concern about the child's health due to his severe clinical condition was frequently reported during the interview and, in addition, the feeling of

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*It was horrible! I was worried about her health and whether she would survive. (P01)*

*Sad to know that I could not take my daughter home at that moment. (P02)*

*At first, anxiety and fear, afterwards, I was reassuring myself in the certainty guaranteed by faith. (M02)*

*Sadness and concern for her life. (M06)*

*I felt impotent for not being able to help him and also felt safe because I know he is being cared for. (M07)*

The difficulties expressed by the participants according to the emotional state and perception about the child's state of health were varied. It is described, among the difficulties reported, the locomotion for maternity as one of the problems most cited during the interviews. It is reported that the maternity has a shelter home with the purpose of accommodating the mothers of neighboring municipalities during the period of hospitalization, however, the maternity is located in another neighborhood, which makes it difficult to carry out the visits.

*The biggest issue for me is that of being from another city, but within the NICU, it was only a matter of adapting to the NICU's operation, precautions and rules. (M03)*

*Difficulties in getting transportation to visit because I live in another city. (P03)*

*Lack of a support house closer to the maternity ward. (P07)*

*The difficulty was the distance to live in another city. (P01)*

*The distance from home to motherhood. (P06)*

There were also difficulties in seeing the child in the incubator; in adapting to the rules and regulations of the NICU; in dealing with feelings of fear and sadness; for only the mother to be discharged, as well as the impotence for not being able to help in the recovery of the child and to have to reconcile the new routine to the post-surgical care of the mothers.

*Difficulty in seeing him in the incubator. (M01)*

*Many difficulties, because the post-surgery is traumatic and the mixture of feelings as well. (M02)*

*The difficulty was knowing that he could not go home for a few months. (M07)*

*Seeing in a serious condition and not being able to do much to help other than being present on the days of hospitalization. (M10)*

### ◆ Absence of difficulties reported by fathers and mothers during the period of hospitalization of the neonate

Some parents interviewed during the reports were calm, since they said they did not face any type of difficulty related to the child's hospitalization, as can be evidenced below.

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*There were no difficulties. (P09)*

*I had no difficulty. (P05)*

*No difficulty, despite seeing it so small. (M04)*

#### ◆ Perception of parents regarding the importance of their presence during the hospitalization of their child

In this category, all participants reported that they considered their presence important during hospitalization, and the reasons for the importance of remaining close to the children varied between: the contribution to recovery of the baby's health status; the formation of the affective bond so that the children recognize them as their parents and also because the proximity relieves the concern.

*It is important because I can see it and relieves my worry. (M01)*

*Of course, because I can get closer to her, to have more affection for her so she can leave soon, as soon as possible. (P09)*

*For sure. Because of the conviviality during pregnancy, the child feels familiar with the conversations, contacts and caresses. (P08)*

*I consider it important to follow the progress of the situation and because the child feels the warmth of the father and this contributes to her health. (P01)*

*Yes. Because my presence is good for her health. (P04)*

*Very important because I am close and surveys say that the more visits, the better the development of the baby according to professionals. (P05)*

*A lot, because they perceive the presence, the touch and this helps a lot in the recovery, it was like she was still in the womb, so it's very important. (M10)*

*Yes, extremely, essentially, because the mother's affection, the lap, the smell, the voice, according to medical guidelines, the baby recognizes and this helps him in recovery. (M03)*

*Yes, because it's precious any time we spend with the one we love and that tightens the bonds. (P02)*

## DISCUSSION

In the face of the discovery of the desired pregnancy, even if unplanned, a succession of expectations related to gestational development, perfect delivery, breastfeeding, early care and hospital discharge are triggered in the mothers. A special experience is experienced by the father, together with the mother, in this singular moment, which involves the awakening of new emotions and the complexity of adapting to the changes that will reflect on the responsibilities, concerns and care that the birth of a child demands.<sup>9</sup>

It is pointed out that, depending on the individuality of each woman, besides the biopsychosocial transformations that characterize the pregnancy period, there may also be complications that imply a risk factor for the health of the mother and child binomial, configuring a risky pregnancy.<sup>10</sup>

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The NICU is considered to be a hospital environment specifically prepared for the admission of newborns with fragile health, whether due to some pathology at birth or by immaturity of the physiological functions necessary for survival. It is noticed that, in this situation, the neonates need a specific contribution and special care in order to treat and reestablish their health, postponing, consequently, their hospital discharge.<sup>6</sup>

Other studies are corroborated by the results of this study,<sup>6,11</sup> when it was revealed that the need for child hospitalization in a NICU is a difficult reality faced by parents, since this event generates frustration of the expectations created during the gestation period, implying the emergence of negative feelings such as disappointment, sadness, fear and concern about the survival of the child. It is also inferred that the parents have to deal with the early separation, which has great potential to hinder the formation of the affective bond between the family.

It is understood that another important factor is the change in the routine of fathers and mothers, which culminates in abandonment of some of their social functions, generating a separation from family life and can influence the estrangement between the couple. It contributes, for such consequences, to the advent of the emotional imbalance and the solitude, facilitating the disintegration of the family.<sup>2</sup>

In this perspective, the presence of the mother and father during the period of internment in the NICU generates benefits for their emotional health,<sup>2</sup> as observed during the participants' reports when relating the visits to a safety gain, tranquility, knowledge about the clinical picture of the baby, follow-up of its development and opportunity to prepare for the care that will be performed after discharge.

They are interested in the presence of the participants, the strengthening of the affective bond and the possibility of touching the child, transferring heat, transmitting security and warmth, actions that will contribute significantly to the reestablishment of the baby's health. It is confirmed by these results, a research carried out that reveals that the touch to hospitalized newborns, when their state of health allows, is of paramount importance for being a powerful means of communication and transmission of feelings and emotions, not only for sensitizing the affective bond, but also by contributing with their physiological responses, increasing the production of hormones and influencing their immune system.<sup>12</sup>

It is considered that the recovery of the baby does not depend solely on the medical care, but also on the care and affection that he may receive from his parents.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore essential that the professionals working in the NICU work with a care humanized and focused not only on scientific techniques and knowledge, but also providing

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support to the neonate's family, giving clear information about the clinical picture and the interventions necessary for his recovery.

In this sense, the NICU team should promote a welcoming environment for parents in order to facilitate the interaction of the father and mother with other professionals, and should clarify the doubts, since these procedures minimize the distress, convey trust and understanding on the needs of the equipments connected to the child and prepare them for the reality of the NICU environment, such as excessive lighting, smell and noise, especially with regard to the first visit.

It is also added, as was observed in the category *Perception of parents regarding the importance of their presence during the hospitalization of their child*, that the health education carried out by the professionals on the first day of the visit of the mother and the father to the hospitalized neonate instructs them and sensitizes them regarding the importance of their presence in this period of hospitalization, making them responsible for the care given to the baby. It was revealed from the results found in this study that the comfort that motherhood offers parents is of fundamental importance for increasing the frequency of visits or their stay in the NICU. It is therefore imperative that maternity provide care and comfort to the companions, regarding the stay and the trip to the unit, aiming at a better care of the parents to the newborn, which will contribute to a better recovery of Your health.

It is therefore essential that maternity comply with article 12 of Law No. 8069 of 1990, which establishes the right to full-time stay of one of the parents or guardian in cases of hospitalization in health facilities, including the NICU, which should provide conditions for such stay.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is believed that the results of the study transcribed the reality experienced by mothers and fathers who have their child hospitalized in a NICU. With this, it was possible to look at the feelings aroused, difficulties faced and their perceptions regarding the importance of their presence during this moment of hospitalization.

It is noted, based on the lines, that the majority of parents are surprised by feelings of sadness, concern and impotence for not being able to provide the child with the ideal care during pregnancy. Due to the impossibility of discharge from hospital, besides the frustration, changes in their routines make it difficult to rest after delivery, especially in cases of complicated deliveries.

It is pertinent, from this perspective, for professionals to act consistently in transmitting information about the baby's health in a coherent and easy-to-understand way, and to sensitize the father and mother to the need for their constant

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presence or more frequent visits to the baby. aiming at the reestablishment of health and strengthening of the affective bond, reducing the hospital stress and, consequently, reducing the length of hospitalization.

In this sense, hospitals/maternalities should favor a better attendance of the parents during the period of neonatal hospitalization, providing them with rest, comfort and food during this period.

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