



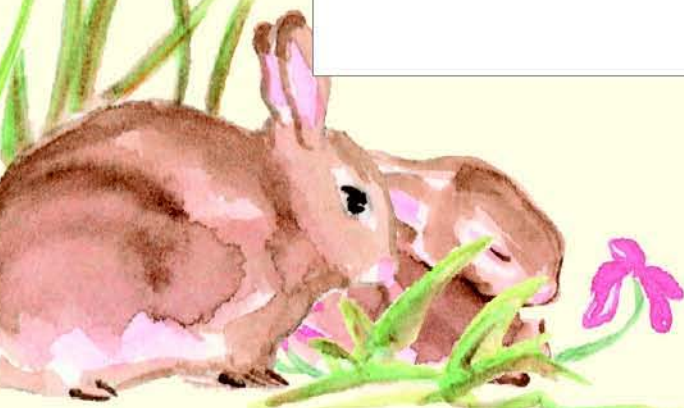
## *March of Dimes NICU Family Support at Capital Health System*

The March of Dimes *NICU Family Support* project has had a very exciting and eventful first year. The main objective of the program is to help meet the educational and emotional needs of families whose children are hospitalized in the NICU at Capital Health System. Toward this end, the March of Dimes has planned and implemented several programs in the NICU at Capital Health System in Trenton. A Chapter NICU Advisory Committee (CNAC) made up of hospital professionals, NICU graduate parents, and March of Dimes staff was formed and meets regularly to make decisions about the needs of the hospital and the direction of the project. Following an extensive assessment of the NICU, the CNAC decided to implement three modules: **Antepartum, Sibling and Extended Family**, and **Transition to Home**.



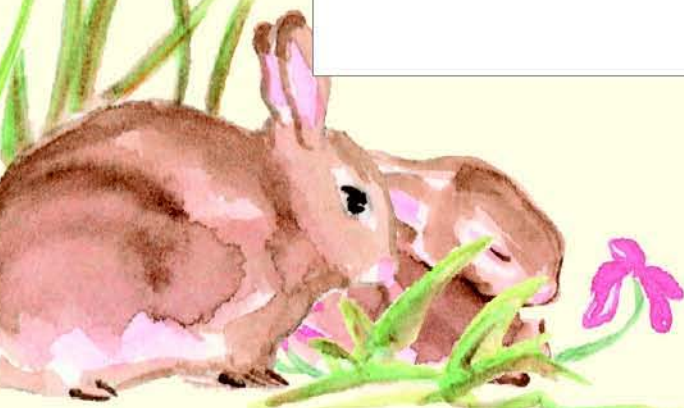


**The Antepartum module**, led by Kathy Donaldson (clinical nurse educator) and Holly Studzinski (NICU graduate parent), is dedicated to providing educational materials and emotional support to mothers who are placed on bed-rest in anticipation of an early birth. This can be a very stressful and tedious time and the March of Dimes is happy to provide these families with resources to help make their wait as comfortable as possible.





**The Sibling and Extended Family Module**, led by Dr. Randi Axelrod (head neonatologist) and Christy Keppel (NICU graduate parent) was formed to help serve the needs of the entire family. We provide educational materials in the NICU for family members to read that include topics on safety and dealing with the emotions of the NICU experience. In addition, we offer parent and extended family education hours twice monthly—we invite parents to come listen to a guest speaker (a hospital professional or graduate NICU family) speak on a variety of related topics (“Reading Baby’s Cues,” “Going Home”, etc). We also plan to begin offering Sibling Hours twice monthly to help older children learn about the NICU and feel included in their new sibling’s care. Siblings receive a toy medical kit, a special NICU T-shirt, and a special children’s book about the NICU experience. They also have a chance to make a craft for their new sister or brother and, in some cases, arrangements are made for the children to view their sibling through the NICU window.





**The Transition to Home Module**, led by Helen Varacallo (NICU nurse) and Valerie Hamilton (NICU graduate parent), was chosen with the idea of helping parents feel equipped and ready to take their infant home after their stay in the NICU. Towards this end, the committee has worked extensively with the NICU staff to redesign the Transition to Home binder that every parent receives upon admission to the NICU (the idea being that the transition home begins on the first day of admission to the NICU). The existing folder contained a great deal of information, but parents found it hard to read. The new binder was designed in a collaboration between graduate parents and NICU staff to ensure that it met the educational needs of new NICU parents. In addition to the binder, the Transition to Home sub-committee has purchased books to start a lending library of parenting materials in the NICU. They also plan to provide speakers and topics for the twice-monthly Parent Hours related to topics around the transition from NICU to home.





In addition to the three modules, the NICU Family Support Specialist spends 30 hours a week in the NICU, interfacing with parents, siblings, grandparents, and hospital staff. She assists with the implementation of the modules and talks to families daily to provide support and information. Every NICU family receives a Parent Care Kit—a small gift bag that contains a NICU glossary, a Parent Booklet, and a NICU Baby Book designed by a NICU mother, as well as a special gift from the March of Dimes. The NICU Family Support Specialist also works on identifying and interviewing potential NICU graduate parents who are interested in becoming direct service volunteers. These 4-5 volunteers (who were themselves NICU parents at one time) will spend approximately an hour a week in the NICU, talking to parents and offering support and comfort to families.

