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Strategies to support maternal-newborn bonding for mothers of newborn babies admitted in a neonatal intensive care unit at one of the tertiary hospitals in Malawi

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Background: Illness and hospitalization of a newborn baby may interrupt the natural maternal-infant bonding and attachment process. This may in turn affect the maternal-newborn relationships because of stress. It is not documented what strategies were used in the neonatal intensive care units in Malawi to support maternal-newborn bonding.

Aim: This paper explored the strategies used by healthcare providers to support maternal-newborn bonding and attachment for mothers with neonates admitted in a neonatal intensive care unit.

Methodology: The study was qualitative in nature and used in-depth interviews and observations. Five nurse/midwives working in and 10 mothers with infants admitted in the neonatal intensive care unit at one of the tertiary hospitals in Malawi participated in the study.

Results: The results showed that as the nurse/midwives strive to provide special nursing care to the sick infants, several measures were also carried out to support maternal-infant bonding. These measures focused on maternal-infant interaction through breastfeeding, kangaroo mother care and maternal participation in the child's care and nurse/midwife-mother interaction through communication and psychosocial support. These strategies helped the mothers to feel close to their children and develop positive and trustful relationships.

Conclusion: Nurses and midwives working in neonatal intensive care units should strive to promote these strategies to support maternal-newborn attachment. This will minimize maternal-infant separation thereby alleviating anxiety and enhancing maternal confidence when interacting with the newborn baby.

Biography

Ellemes Phuma-Ngaiyaye has completed MSc in Parent and Child Health from University of Botswana and currently pursuing her PhD at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. She works with Mzuzu University, Malawi, as a Lecturer in Pediatric and Neonatal Nursing and Nursing Ethics and Professionalism. She has also worked as a School Coordinator for the ICAP-NEPI Malawi project at her University. As a young and upcoming scholar, she has great interest and motivation in maternal and neonatal health, education and research to contribute to quality health services in the country.

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