Title: NICU-to-Home transition of preterm infants: neonatal staff perspectives and parents’ experiences.

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Abstract:
In recent years the survival rates of preterm infants has improved markedly (Bissell & Long, 2003). This means that more preterm infants and their families must endure long periods of hospitalisation before they can be discharged home, sometimes with unresolved medical issues and special health care needs (Holditch-Davis, 2007; Sheikh, O’Brien & McCluskey-Fawcett, 1993). The importance of preparation for the transition from the NICU to home as a long-term process and not as an isolated event has long been recognised in the care of NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) infants and their families. However, literature suggests that such planning has been based primarily on health care professionals’ views of the needs of infants and their families. Little emphasis has been placed on the parents’ experiences of this transition from the high-tech environment of the NICU to home (Kenner & Lott, 1990). Knowledge about the parents’ lived experiences of this process can be useful in illuminating the needs and priorities of parents and infants, which may differ from those experienced by the care team. Hence, it is important to understand the meanings of the transition from NICU to home for both health professionals and parents, and how these meanings are created and mediated in the interplay between parents and professionals. A secondary consequence of exploring these world views could be an illumination of the potential for misunderstandings and miscommunications that might arise in gaps in the lived experiences and world views of these two groups. This could be vital in identifying potentially better practices for enabling effective NICU to home transitions for preterm infants and their parents.

This study will be carried out into three phases, in phase one a mixed method systematic review will be conducted to identify and synthesis the findings available from published studies addressing the question, ‘What are the perspectives of neonatal staff and parents about the transition of preterm infants from the NICU?’ In both phase two and three a phenomenological approach will be used. Phase two seeks to explore the perspectives of
neonatal staff, which include midwives, nurses and doctors, about the transition of preterm infants from the local NICU to home. One-time interviews will be done with a purposive sample of neonatal staff currently working in the local NICU. Phase three seeks to understand the meanings of the both parents’, mothers and fathers, lived experiences during their baby’s hospitalization in the NICU and throughout the first six months following the baby’s discharge home from the unit. Data in phase three will be collected from a purposive sample of parents whose preterm infants have been cared for in the local NICU. Interviews with both parents will be done at three different time frames; at one month, three months and six months after discharge home of the baby. The methodology and methods selected for this study have been purposely chosen so as to address key gaps which have been identified in the literature.