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The March of Dimes and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) Family Support Effort

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The mission of the March of Dimes (MOD) is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, prematurity, and infant mortality. Being born prematurely increases risks for apnea, intraventricular hemorrhage, patent ductus arteriosus, necrotizing enterocolitis, retinopathy of prematurity, jaundice, chronic lung disease, and general infections to name a few conditions. The MOD is a national health charity that provides research, community services, education, and advocacy efforts in order to save babies' lives.

The March of Dimes NICU Family Support (NFS) project is aimed at helping alleviate the emotional distress and confusion common to families whose children are born prematurely. Built upon a family-centered philosophy, the NFS effort serves both the immediate and extended families of NICU newborns. This support addresses the needs of families throughout the hospitalization, during the transition home, and in the tragic event of a newborn death.

The public health concerns of this experience involved increasing self-efficacy and experiential confidence in NICU families. This behavioral and awareness modification is directed at improving the care of the premature baby in the NICU as well as at home, to provide a strong and consistent source of information from which the families can model their behaviors, offers valid and reliable information regarding prematurity and the social, economical, physical, and mental barriers present. Based on the idea of family centered care, our methods were meant to increase the sense of belonging and level of participation by the family, in the newborn's care.