

Carle implements video diaries service to support family engagement in the NICU

The Challenge

Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) provide critical care to over 300,000 babies annually across the United States due to a range of birth and health complications.

With nearly 15% of all babies born in the US requiring specialist care, thousands of families spend time in the NICU. This experience is often overwhelming and can leave parents feeling anxious, especially when they are away from the unit.

As a level 3 perinatal NICU, Carle Foundation Hospital in Urbana receives referrals from across Illinois, with many families needing to travel around 90 miles to see their babies in the hospital. These large distances, in addition to balancing work and life responsibilities, make it challenging for parents to regularly attend the unit, further adding to the stress and strain they experience. As a result, some parents can have difficulties with bonding and remote milk expression.

While many NICUs have explored live streaming services to alleviate separation anxiety, internet connection, expensive hardware, parental distress (due to lack of context), and clinician capacity are just a few of the challenges associated with the technology.

The Solution

Carle was introduced to vCreate NICU Diaries at a Vermont Oxford conference and began exploring how the asynchronous video technology could alleviate separation anxiety and support family engagement in the NICU.

In August 2023, after contacting the company and with the support of their philanthropy team and funding from their capital team, Carle became the first unit in the United States to implement vCreate. The video diaries service allows NICU staff to securely record and upload short video-clips and photos of the babies on approved devices, which are then shared directly with parents.

Kara Weigler, Nurse Manager at Carle said: *"Before vCreate, we relied on a live streaming service, but when our funding had dried up, and the cameras were no longer covered by their warranty, the prospect of replacing them seemed extremely expensive. We also had concerns about consistently having the cameras on and forgetting to switch the cameras off when needed, so we looked for more seamless alternatives.*

Discovering and collaborating with vCreate was fantastic. They guided us through the security features and the process of implementing the service in the United States. Initially, we introduced it to a select group of super users, gradually extending it to all staff to ensure everyone was comfortable with sharing videos and photos with a small group of families before fully launching vCreate across the entire unit."



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NICU staff can add messages and graphic effects to accompany the videos and photos. These messages, which can be auto-translated into multiple languages, often include a summary of the baby's activity and wellbeing, which helps families feel part of their baby's journey even when they're apart.

Kara Weigler said: *"While there's no specific routine, the nurses typically send a video or photo during the start of every shift, taking only 5 to 7 minutes from start to finish. Our healthcare techs and physical therapy team also love sending videos and photos during their sessions and are among our biggest advocates."*

The Outcomes

Alongside helping keep families connected with their babies and reducing separation anxiety for parents, there are also proven physiological benefits to using vCreate. In a 2020 British Medical Journal (BMJ) report, it identified the "enhanced emotional closeness, increased involvement in care and positive effect on breast milk expression" these visual updates have.

Regarding Carle's experience, Kara Weigler said: *"We love to capture important moments and milestones, such as their first baths, bottle feeds, tuck-in times and after they're extubated, and you're able to see their sweet little faces. This past Christmas when Santa visited the unit, we used vCreate to send special pictures to our families of their little ones with Santa."*

There were twins born in a hospital about an hour away and one of the twins had come to us for critical care while the other twin stayed with Mom at the bedside. Consequently, Mom wasn't able to visit her baby. Getting videos and photos from us was incredibly impactful and they were so grateful to see those early moments."

Unlike many live video systems, vCreate utilises asynchronous video technology to ensure videos and photos are captured at the NICU staff's convenience. Kara Weigler said: *"With live streaming services, parents often miss important moments as they can't be watching 24/7 and nothing is recorded. Whereas, even if parents are here, it's been incredibly impactful to capture and celebrate those moments using vCreate and create a downloadable NICU diary that they can keep forever."*

vCreate's Forms feature allows NICU staff to digitise paper forms and share reminders with patients, families and staff. From Parent Passports to discharge checklists, all forms are completely customisable and available in multiple languages.

Kara Weigler said: *"While we plan to utilise vCreate Forms to support with consent forms, parents and staff education and discharge planning, the multi-language feature has been a huge blessing for our significant population of Spanish speaking families. Being able to translate the site to their preferred language has helped these parents feel more connected to their little ones and the team while they're away from the unit."*

Used in more than 125 neonatal units worldwide, the vCreate service utilises enhanced security measures to ensure patient confidentiality and security are maintained throughout the neonatal journey.

vCreate continues to support Carle Foundation Hospital, St Boniface Hospital, Mount Sinai Hospital and a growing number of North American neonatal units to help keep families connected with their babies.



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If you are interested in exploring how vCreate NICU Diaries could assist your neonatal teams and families, send an email to theteam@vcreate.tv or visit www.vcreate.tv/nicudiaries