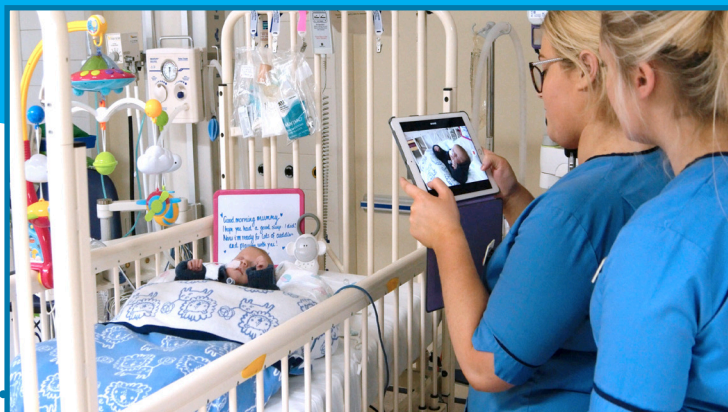


# Video diaries service keeps families connected with their babies in NHS neonatal units



## The Challenge

**Every year in the UK, more than 100,000 babies are treated in NHS neonatal units (NNUs), including intensive care units (NICUs), due to an array of birth and health complications.**

With 1 in 13 babies born prematurely, many families find themselves spending time on neonatal units. These stays can be extremely stressful, particularly for parents when they are away from the unit. For some families, it can be challenging to visit the hospital regularly. Long distances, other children and work commitments are just some of the potential hurdles they may face.

The coronavirus pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges. With disruption to appointments and a one-parent visitation policy in many hospitals during the pandemic, families have had to spend more time apart from their babies than ever before. As a result, many parents suffer separation anxiety, creating challenges with bonding and remote expression, as well as significant stress and upset.

## The Solution

**To help alleviate separation anxiety for parents and keep families connected, NHS Trusts across the country began exploring asynchronous photo and video messaging services.**

In March 2020, the Trevor Mann Baby Unit (TMBU) in Brighton and the Simpson Centre for Reproductive Health at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh began implementing the vCreate NICU Diaries service. The secure system allows neonatal professionals to record and upload short video-clips and photos of the babies on approved devices which are then shared directly with parents.

Neonatologist at the Simpson Centre for Reproductive Health, Vix Monnelly, said: "Our team embraced the NICU Diaries system as soon as we began implementing it. We quickly identified nurses who could champion the service internally and, with the coronavirus pandemic disrupting our usual means of communicating with families, these photos and videos were a positive way to keep parents connected with their baby."

"After sending a photo or video, we love receiving instant feedback from parents via the comments section on the app, thanking us for the visual update and sharing what a difference they make. The effects for special events such as Christmas and Mother's Day are also great for helping us share memories with families on these meaningful days."

*"After sending a photo or video, we love receiving instant feedback from parents via the comments section on the app, thanking us for the visual update and sharing what a difference they make."*

**Vix Monnelly,**  
Neonatologist,  
Simpson Centre for  
Reproductive Health

Neonatal teams can add messages to accompany the photo and video updates. These often include a summary of the baby's activity and wellbeing but can also include personalised notes and graphic effects.

Margaret Hunt, Senior Neonatal Nurse at the TMBU, said: *"It's been invaluable to share a baby's special moments and milestones with families who otherwise would have missed them. We prioritise personalising care and leading with a family-integrated approach, so we love being able to tailor our photos and videos to include personalised messages for parents and other relatives."*

*"Before the vCreate system, we could only phone families to update them on their baby's care which we found often disrupted parents' vital respite time. Now, their babies' photos and videos are available on the secure web app for them to view at their leisure and can be downloaded as keepsakes when babies are discharged. In addition, during the coronavirus pandemic and with the one parent visitation policy in place, the platform has helped us share updates with families in real-time so both parents still feel part of the same experience."*



## The Outcomes

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

Of NHS Lothian's experience, Vix Monnelly said: *"Following the overwhelmingly positive feedback we received about the system from parents, we noticed that mothers on our unit are particularly responsive to updates sent during the night. This is when people tend to feel most anxious about their baby's welfare and when mothers who are breastfeeding try to remotely express."*

*"For these mothers, the photos and videos act not only as a comfort but as an aid to help them remotely express. One mother even shared that she re-watches previously sent vCreate videos at night because she struggles to express without them. As a team, we're striving for each family to be sent at least one visual update every night for their first two weeks, so this psychological and emotional support is available to everyone."*

The impact of the service is not only felt by parents but by the wider family too, including older siblings who may be struggling to process the neonatal unit experience.

Margaret Hunt said: *"It's easy to overlook how a baby's neonatal stay can affect brothers, sisters, grandparents, and other family members. The platform has allowed us to reopen communication channels with these relatives, sharing messages and updates addressed to an older sibling or a first-time grandparent."*

*"At TMBU, we've started asking parents about their other children and loved ones – if they have a nickname, if they prefer 'Nana' or 'Grandma', what they like to do etc. – so we personalise messages for them as much as possible. The response to these updates has been amazing, especially for older siblings who find it difficult to understand what is happening to their new brother or sister. We champion family-integrated care and vCreate has helped us achieve this even during a global pandemic."*

Having received approval from over 100 NHS Trusts, the vCreate NICU Diaries service utilises enhanced security measures to ensure patient confidentiality and security are maintained throughout the neonatal journey.

vCreate Diaries continues to support the Trevor Mann Baby Unit and the Simpson Centre for Reproductive Health along with over 125 other NNUs to help keep families connected with their babies.



*"We champion family-integrated care and vCreate has helped us achieve this even during a global pandemic."*

**Margaret Hunt,**  
Senior Neonatal Nurse,  
Trevor Mann Baby Unit,  
Brighton



**If you are interested in exploring how vCreate NICU Diaries could assist your neonatal teams and families, email [theteam@vcreate.tv](mailto:theteam@vcreate.tv) or visit [www.vcreate.tv/nicudiaris](http://www.vcreate.tv/nicudiaris)**