

St. Boniface Hospital's NICU implements video diaries service to keep families connected with their babies.

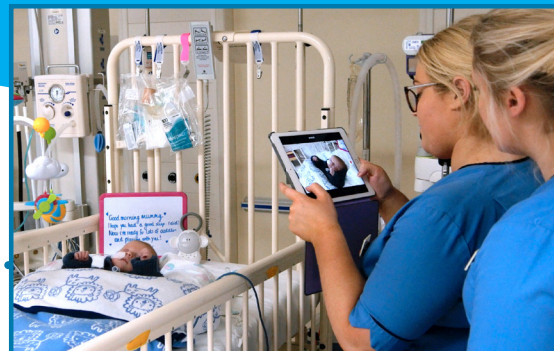
The Challenge

More than 120,000 babies are treated in Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) across Canada every year due to a range of birth and health complications.

With nearly 1 in 12 babies born prematurely, thousands of families spend time in the NICU. These stays can be extremely stressful, particularly for parents when they are away from the unit.

As a level 3 tertiary NICU, St. Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg supports families across Manitoba, Nunavut and Northern Ontario, many of whom require multiple modes of transport to reach the unit. These large distances, along with the possibility of other children at home and work commitments, make it difficult for many parents to regularly attend the unit.

As the country continues to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, parental access in the NICU remains limited. With little on-site space to store food and necessities, even parents who live relatively nearby may struggle to see their baby frequently. As a result, some suffer with separation anxiety which can present difficulties with bonding and remote milk expression, as well as cause significant stress and upset.



The Solution

St. Boniface Hospital began exploring how technology could help alleviate separation anxiety and nurture remote bonding for parents in the NICU.

In December 2021, funded by the St. Boniface Hospital Foundation, the unit began implementing vCreate NICU Diaries. The secure video diary service allows neonatal staff to record and upload short video-clips and photos of the babies on approved devices which are then shared directly with parents.

Veronica Braganza, Registered Nurse at St. Boniface Hospital said: *"Our team really embraced the Diaries system after a smooth implementation process and hands-on learning experience. The support from the vCreate team in the UK has been outstanding; they're always responsive to queries and helped us train 77 nurses, around 90% of our staff, in the two weeks leading-up to the launch date at Christmas."*

"The vCreate interface is simple to use and understand, which made it easy for us to learn how to incorporate taking and sharing videos and photos into our routines. The parents love the visual updates and our team finds it extremely motivating when families send messages of thanks back."

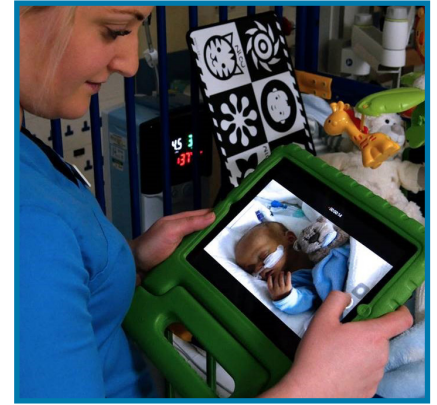
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Veronica Braganza
Registered Nurse
St. Boniface Hospital

vCreate has become an adaptable part of the unit's Family Integrated Care model. Emily Frodsham, Registered Nurse at St. Boniface, said: "Our unit tablet devices typically come out after our morning rounds and during moments when a baby is going through care. For example, if a baby is having a bath or eating, we'll send a quick video or photo to the parents to keep them updated."

Neonatal staff can add messages and graphic effects to accompany the videos and photos. These messages, which can be auto-translated into other 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.

Clinical Resource Nurse, Cheryl Staerk, added: "Prior to the vCreate system we would use disposable cameras and phone calls to share early moments and daily updates with families, which was problematic. Many parents found receiving calls from the unit triggering, so being able to send visual updates that families can access at their convenience, without disrupting respite time, is hugely beneficial."



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 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.

Of St. Boniface Hospital's experience, Veronica Braganza said: "One year on from implementing the technology, we're delighted to have helped support nearly 300 families with over 1,800 photos and videos. As so many parents must travel huge distances to attend the unit, the service is crucial in helping us keep families connected and involved in their baby's care."

Members of the nursing team have received amazing feedback from multiple families utilising the service. Emily Frodsham said: "We have parents contacting us to ask for a vCreate update because they find it such a positive and rewarding experience."

"For one mother in particular, the vCreate videos and photos were a lifeline while she was isolating with COVID and unable to visit her baby. Receiving those daily updates and being able to see he was ok helped to bring light to her day and provide reassurance during such a difficult time."

Lisa Thomson Stifora, Director of Communications and Stewardship with St. Boniface Hospital Foundation, which funded the service, said: "Helping bring this connective technology to parents to meet their emotional needs has been wonderful. We love sharing these stories with our donors and wider community, as it's incredible to see the real-life impact this initiative continues to have."

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

vCreate continues to support St. Boniface Hospital, Mount Sinai Hospital and a growing number of Canadian 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