

Improving Outcomes Through Skin-to-Skin Care in a Level III Neonatal ICU

When nurses are equipped with competency-based education and structured workflow tools, skin-to-skin care becomes not the exception – but the standard.

Background / Significance

Skin-to-skin (STS) care is an evidence-based intervention shown to improve:

- Physiologic stability (HR, RR, oxygen saturation)
- Thermoregulation
- Neurodevelopmental outcomes
- Parent-infant bonding
- Breastfeeding success
- Length of stay in some populations

Despite global recommendations and strong literature support, consistent implementation remains challenging due to:

- Equipment limitations
- Staff confidence with ventilated/high-acuity infants
- Workflow constraints
- Competing clinical priorities

Supporting staff competency and workflow integration is essential to ensure equitable access to STS care in the NICU.

Purpose / Problem Statement

The purpose of this project was to increase the frequency and quality of STS care in a Level III NICU by:

- Addressing staff knowledge gaps
- Reducing procedural barriers
- Standardizing STS practice

Key Interventions

Nurse Education

- Skills check-offs
- Simulation for ventilated infants
- Bedside coaching

Workflow Optimization

- Visual preparation guides
- Standardized STS protocol
- Equipment readiness tools

EHR Integration

- Documentation prompts
- Structured STS event tracking
- Data monitoring dashboard

Parent Engagement

- Education materials
- Bedside coaching
- Encouraging parental advocacy
- Inclusion in daily care planning



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Results / Outcomes

After three months:

30% increase in documented STS events

Staff reported:

- Increased confidence
- Improved efficiency
- Greater comfort facilitating STS with ventilated/high-acuity infants

Parents reported:

- Increased satisfaction
- Stronger sense of connection
- Greater participation in infant care

Implications for Nursing Practice

This project highlights the critical role of NICU nurses in advancing:

- Neuroprotective care
- Family-centered practice
- Equitable access to evidence-based interventions

Embedding structured competency education, workflow tools, and parent engagement strategies supports sustained improvement in infant outcomes and parental involvement.

Ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration and reinforcement are essential to maintain progress.

