New Start for PIRI’s Youngest Recruits

PIRI and the Infant Clinic are dedicated in their quest to make a difference to the lives of premature babies and their families. Over the years we have engaged in a number of projects supporting this vulnerable group. A recent successful grant has provided us with the opportunity to expand our research and support to these families in the very early days.

Mothers of babies born less than 30 weeks gestational age are now being given the opportunity to be a part of PremieStart, PIRI’s most recent research into the brain development of premature babies. Currently, up to 50% of Victorian preterm infants suffer from one or more developmental difficulties in early childhood. It is hoped that the PremieStart program will make a difference to this at-risk population by reducing stress in the early months after birth - a time when infants are exposed to necessary but painful hospital procedures and are often unable to experience normal levels of physical interaction with their mothers.

PremieStart focuses on improving mother-baby interactions through an intensive 8-session training program, held with the mother while the babies are still in the NICU. Last year PIRI was awarded a four-year research grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to fund the PremieStart research program.

Recruitment for this randomised control trial started earlier this year at both the Mercy Hospital for Women and the Royal Women’s Hospital.

For further information contact Dr Carol Newnham or Leanne Trinder on 9496 4496.

The Parent Infant Research Institute (PIRI) is a vigorous and innovative Australian research institute focussing on understanding, developing and applying treatments to improve parent and infant well being. PIRI believes that early intervention is the key to better outcomes for families.

While PIRI has a strong research focus, it also comprises a clinical unit (Infant Clinic). The Infant Clinic is a Centre of Excellence and provides a clinical service to assist with the difficulties experienced by parents and infants in the first years of life.
PremieHUGS: A Specialised Group Program for Mothers and their Premature Babies

While there may be some psychosocial assistance following a preterm birth while still in hospital, upon returning home from hospital, services seem to be lacking for this population. A limited number of support groups and websites exist (see featured box, this page), but there appears to be a paucity of community-based support specifically for this group. Rather, mothers are encouraged to attend their regular mother’s group, which many find unhelpful. The needs, anxieties and practicalities of mothering a premature infant are quite unique and are often unmet through the standard mothers group. We identified the need for a specialised group for mothers and their prems and developed PremieHUGS.

The development and piloting of our PremieHUGS program was made possible by a research funding grant by Telstra. PremieHUGS is an 8-week group program for mums and their prems under 12-months corrected age. Each session lasts 2-hrs and has 3 major components:

- mother-baby play and interaction, with a focus on infant development and enhancing mother-baby interaction and attachment;
- maternal adjustment and self-care;
- psychoeducation around infant development, temperament and attachment.

To date, we have fully manualised the program and run 2 pilot groups. The groups were very well received by the participants who provided positive feedback on the content of the program. In addition, we gathered quantitative data at 3-timepoints, which we are yet to analyse and report. We hope to offer PremieHUGS as an ongoing program through the Infant Clinic.

PremiePress

PremiePress is a quarterly research-based magazine produced by Dr Carol Newnham, which focuses on preterm babies, children and their parents. PremiePress is written in easy-to-understand accessible language and presented in an attractive format for parents and health care providers. A yearly subscription comprising 4 editions (hard or electronic version) is $40 (Australia-wide or $60 for an international subscription). For more information or to subscribe contact Liz Barbante on 9496 4496 or elizabeth.barbante@austinf.org.au.

FURTHER SUPPORT FOR PREMS & THEIR PARENTS

Did you know, Tuesday 12th June 2007 was the first National Premmies Day?

The following websites may be useful in accessing information for health professionals and parents of prems:

L’il Aussie Prems: www.lilaussieprems.com
Austprem: www.austprem.org.au
Research News...

Beating the Blues
Before Birth

We are now recruiting for this new research program, which aims to treat antenatal depression. It is ideal for pregnant women who are depressed or struggling to cope. The project aims to compare routine antenatal care with our newly developed cognitive behavioural (CBT) group intervention. We are currently accepting referrals within the Northern region for the first group, which we hope to begin in July. If you know of any pregnant women that might benefit from this program or would like some more information please contact Christopher Holt on 9496 4493.

Models of Care

Recruitment for Models of Care has now finished and we are in the final stages of analysing the results. We will be presenting findings to the council areas of Banyule, Whitehorse and Nillumbik, who participated in the program. New referrals are now triaged into other Infant Clinic services. Thanks to all who have participated in this important research program and we look forward to presenting our findings.

WELCOME!

We welcome new staff member Hetti Dubow, a psychologist who joins the team at the Austin Parent-Infant Program (APIP) working with mothers and babies in an inpatient setting.

AND FAREWELL...

We have a few sad farewells...

We wave goodbye to senior psychologist Yolanda Romeo, who leaves PIRI and the Infant Clinic after almost 5-years of dedicated service to our department. Yolanda has been involved in many research programs conducted through PIRI, including Toward Parenthood and Models of Care. Yolanda conducted our Getting Ahead of PND Group Program as well as providing therapy for many mothers and babies. Yolanda was also a supervisor to many student registrars on clinical placements at the Infant Clinic.

It is also farewell to Anne-Catherine Rolland, a psychiatrist from France. She is returning home after working with us for 12-months, primarily on the PremieStart and CommunityHUGS programs.

Finally, to Susan Breton, who after 12-months working on the PIMHI program has moved to Austin CAHMS.

We extend our appreciation to all those we farewell and thank them for their contribution to PIRI and the Infant Clinic.

CONGRATULATIONS!

We send our hearty congratulations on two new arrivals!!

To Nisha Brown, pictured below with baby Eloise...

...and to Lucy O’Neill, pictured below with baby Gemma

Parent-Infant Research Institute, Austin Health

TEL: 9496 4496 FAX: 9496 4148

www.piri.org.au