Premature Babies Receive High-Tech Medical Help

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UC San Diego Telemedicine partners with Tri-City Medical Center NICU

An innovative telemedicine program connecting neonatal specialists from UC San Diego Medical Center and Tri-City Medical Center's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) will allow experts to collaborate, diagnose and treat some of San Diego County's tiniest, most difficult cases. Using a real-time, two-way audio/video connection will – in many situations – eliminate the need for Tri-City to transport their patients. However, in cases where further care is needed, this program allows for coordinated care and a transfer to the NICU at UC San Diego Medical Center.

Frank Mannino, MD, discusses this innovation in patient care (click photo to watch).

"This partnership allows us to produce a faster diagnosis and better chance for our hospital's youngest and most vulnerable patients to continue to be cared for close to home and loved ones," explained Hamid Movahhedian, MD, FAAP, Tri-City NICU Medical Director, chief, division of Neonatology, and vice chair of Pediatrics.

"In addition to allowing earlier diagnoses, we will be able to use this program in a host of ongoing educational programs, and support UC San Diego Health System's and Tri-City Medical Center's goal of continuously improving the overall quality of patient care," said Neil Finer, MD, director of Neonatal Medicine, UC San Diego Health System. "We look forward to a close and productive working relationship with Tri-City Medical Center."

The innovative telemedicine program is the first of its kind in the San Diego region allowing physicians, nursing staff and other health care professionals to collaboratively participate in cutting edge care of these patients and families, as well as learn various diagnoses first hand by participating in the live video stream.

Since 2009, UC San Diego's enterprise-wide telemedicine program has fostered discussions with in-house specialists and specialty departments, as well as interested partners in the county, state, national and world-wide health care community who need subspecialty consultative care. A key feature of the program is that its core workflow, checklists and deployment strategies can be integrated into most any UC San Diego department's clinical strategic plan.

"The power of telemedicine is extraordinary, allowing our NICU specialists to be available at a moment's notice to help provide expert care for these smallest and most fragile of patients. We are ecstatic to be part of the solution for such a critical care need," explained Brett C. Meyer, MD, medical director of UC San Diego's enterprise-wide Telemedicine Program "When a complex case arises our partners at Tri-City can request a consult and can contact us using the camera system. Our specialists can not only contribute to the care, but with telemedicine they are, in essence, virtually present in the room with the patient to render assistance."

The NICU at Tri-City Medical Center cares for 500 to 600 premature infants each year in its 20-bed nursery, the largest in North County. Opened in 1986, it is the only Level III NICU in North County, providing the highest level of neonatal care and most advanced technology available in the region.

The partnership is made possible through Proposition 1D Bond funds awarded to UC San Diego which will cover telemedicine equipment costs and maintenance.   A grant from Tri-City Hospital Foundation will cover credentialing expenses for UC San Diego physicians participating in the program.

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