

# lifelines

Starting off right in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at St. Louis Children's Hospital



The array of medical equipment — an intimidating but necessary feature of the NICU environment.



Ciara Adams dotes on her son, Eddie, born four months premature, who underwent several surgeries for intestinal problems.



Anna Lijowska, MD, talks with dad Stephen Spraggs about his son, Nicholas, born with a genetic skin disease, who later went home healthy.



Amid a tangle of tubes and wires, Billie Kathryn Faye Dodson takes her days one breath, one heartbeat at a time.

- The 52-bed NICU is the largest intensive care unit at Washington University Medical Center by any measure: size, number of patient days, admissions and staff.
- The NICU admits about 700 babies per year, from within BJC HealthCare hospitals and from across the United States and around the world.
- About half of the NICU babies are premature; the others are full-term infants requiring multiple services.
- The NICU is staffed by specially trained physicians and nurses whose sole focus is treating sick newborns. In addition, nationally known surgical, heart, brain, spinal cord, immunology, kidney and other specialists are available to consult on any problem that arises.
- While the staff cares for medically fragile infants, they also help families make the transition from illness to wellness and help them overcome fear of their baby's condition when they are preparing for discharge.
- A support group of NICU parents provides families with advice and support throughout a baby's stay. Full-time social workers also are available to help parents cope.
- Treatments to help babies breathe include: surfactant therapy, conventional ventilation, and high-frequency oscillatory ventilation (a rapid breathing machine necessary for some infants to help lungs develop and heal).

“We want parents from Day 1 to bond with their babies, looking at every little wrinkle, every little toe, and really feel like parents, because we know what they're going through.”

Joanna Schloemann, RNC, NNP,  
nurse practitioner and former NICU parent

PHOTOS BY TIM PARKER