

English for Neonatal Nurses Special English for Special Professionals

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Summary:

English for Neonatal Nurses (2ECTS) was given as part of in-service training organized jointly by Helsinki, Tampere, and Oulu University Central Hospitals in spring 2015. This article discusses the successful outcome of this special language course provided by TAMK Language Centre.

English for Neonatal Nurses (2ECTS) was organized in spring 2015 as part of Taitava Neonataalihoitaja in-service training intended for nurses working in Neonatal intensive care units, High dependency units and Neonatal wards. The aim of the education was enhancing evidence-based nursing as well as standardizing the care practices in Neonatal units in Finland. The aim of the English course provided by TAMK Language Centre was to acquaint Neonatal Nurses with the special terminology in their professional field.

Communicating in English – Various Needs

To communicate successfully with families, Neonatal Nurses need to master a variety of registers and styles. You need emotional language skills when providing support and comforting sick infants' parents during difficult times. You need to know Medical and Nursing English to follow the ongoing research and to keep your expertise and professional skills updated. You also need to know everyday English to teach and instruct parents to participate in the care of their baby.

Neonatal nurses are in a key role reassuring the overwhelmed parents who have all but expected their happy family event ending up in a pre-term delivery. You have to be considerate, tactful and empathetic. You need to encourage the parents to at least talk and sing to their fragile baby when it's too early to participate in the actual care. You have to comfort the parents who want to take their baby's pain away and who themselves are hurting immensely when seeing their tiny baby with paper-thin skin and eyes that can't yet open. The situation is sensitive as it is, and having to do this in a foreign language won't make it any easier.

The requirement to know Medical and Nursing English includes the knowledge of common reasons for admission to the neonatal intensive care unit or the neonatal ward, i.e. the health problems preemies often, and full-term babies sometimes are suffering from. You should read medical journals, and attend further education every now and then. You may have Nursing or Medical students to supervise or visitors from other countries to present your unit or ward to. You act as a link between the Physicians, other Specialists and the parents. Your task is to digest the medical and technical information delivered by the doctors, and convey it to the parents in a more comprehensible, patient-friendly form. You answer the parents' questions and make sure everything relating to their baby's care and the procedures performed is understood. You have to

encourage questions again and again remembering that the confused parents don't necessarily remember what had been said earlier.

Your task as a Neonatal Nurse is to be prepared to demonstrate, assist, support, and answer the insecure parents' questions – also in a foreign language if and when needed. Neonatal Nurses play a crucial role in promoting early interaction and bonding between the parents and their preemie to ensure successful emotional development. When the premature baby's condition allows, the parents can start participating in the baby's everyday care routines. Changing diapers, feeding and washing, or providing precious Kangaroo care are still challenged by the baby's need to be connected to monitors. You are there to teach parents how to put their hands through the arm holes and touch the baby while she's lying in the incubator. You give step-by-step guidance on how to express milk, get the gavage feeding, and eventually breastfeeding started. Before and after each care activity you remind the parents of the importance of meticulous hand hygiene and disinfection practices to prevent further problems. Family-centered care entails letting the parents participate in the preemie's care as much and as often as they want.

Implementation of the 'English for Neonatal Nurses' Language Course

The course was carried out online during spring 2015 and it was attended by 31 Neonatal nurses working in Tampere, Helsinki, and Oulu University Central Hospitals. As part of the English course the students contributed papers on their physical workplace, duties and responsibilities during a shift, and interaction with parents. They also had to come up with a reflection paper on the study process itself.

Reflection and Evaluation

The course seemed to inspire the nurses to further develop their English skills and they felt they had received tools to do so. The more they had to use the special terminology, the more confident they felt. The nurses also appreciated the need to get involved with scientific English. They became more tolerant towards possible errors in speech, and felt joy in succeeding in supporting the families better. The participants understood that to utilize their efforts best is to become professionally active in English, and that the best, immediate feedback comes from the parents in the ward.

The authentic, down-to-earth descriptions of neonatal nurses' shifts, daily duties, and encounters with the preemies' parents gave a better understanding of everyday language skills needed on the ward. The participants shared information about the latest medical advances in Neonatology, such as the advances in technology and medications. As a teacher of the course I gained more in-depth knowledge about the procedures and treatments performed on premature newborns. .

The participants' essay assignments gave a bigger picture of how Special Neonatal care is organized in various parts in Finland. One of the nurses brought up the geographical challenges, along with how the transportation of preemies is organized within the hospital district. She discussed what it means when you have a baby in need of intensive care, and the distance to the nearest Neonatal Intensive Care Unit is 550 kilometers. The participants also introduced the vast multi-professional teams of specialists and therapists taking care of tiny preemie babies, as well as various projects and programmes the Neonatal wards of our University Hospitals participate in. The reader was definitely reminded of the high-quality nursing we have in Finland.

As a teacher, I enjoyed reading the reflections of nurses who had been in the career for various lengths of time. The experienced nurses gladly shared their expertise and gave examples on how neonatal care has developed over the years. I appreciate learning about the career path of the newly-graduated nurse – what it takes for a graduate from the University of Applied Sciences to work as a competent neonatal nurse. I cherished a comment made by a newly-graduated student who already at the beginning of her career path knew she had chosen the right career.

I learned about the precious profession of a Neonatal Nurse. I'm in awe of the nurses' competence and skills to provide care for an immature newborn with special needs. Their job is that of an efficient emergency nurse and a sympathetic family nurse, and everything between. The situation can change in a minute from cuddling a baby in peace and quiet to having to revive a newborn with breathing problems - that being the beauty of the job, as they say. I was touched by the Neonatal Nurses' devotion and dedication. They feel their work has a purpose and they feel privileged to be doing what they do. They rejoice with the parents in the tiniest milestones, like when the preemies get to taste the first drops of their own mother's milk. I learned a lot about the preemies too. I learned that they are tough, little fighters, real warriors who win you over. They truly are heroes and heroines and it takes a special character to take care of them.

Conclusion:

In addition to mastering specific clinical skills, nursing professionals need the ability to communicate successfully in the area of their expertise. The specific competences required of a nurse, communication skills included, are determined by one's occupational profile. Providing the employees with opportunities to further improve and deepen their skills is likely to show as better care and improved wellbeing at work. On the other hand, language educators benefit from authentic working life connections when designing professional language training. There is a considerable potential in the collaboration between medical and educational institutes - and the rewards are mutual. **English for Neonatal Nurses** is an ideal example of how tailored language training provided by TAMK Language Centre promotes both the participants' and the educator's professional growth.

Kirjoittajakuvaus:

Minna Metsäportti (M.A.) has worked as a Senior Lecturer of English in the School of Health Care at TAMK (Tampere University of Applied Sciences) since 2001. She has many years of experience in teaching professional English in the fields of Nursing and Health Care, Midwifery, Public Health Nursing, Physiotherapy, Radiography and Radiotherapy, Emergency Care, and Biomedical Laboratory Science. She has tailored English courses for specific purposes, such as First Aid, Neonatal Intensive Care, and Children's Cancers. Her areas of interest include Communication Skills for Working Life, CLIL, and Connectivism.