

# Abstract for FiCare Conference, 2024

(300 words excluding title, authors & references)

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## **Title:**

***Informing education and knowledge on the enablers and challenges to communication between preterm infants and their parents.***

## **Background:**

In neonatal care, clear, consistent, and culturally appropriate communication strategies are needed as preterm infants are at risk of developing speech, language and communication problems (Harding et al., 2019; 2022). Experiencing language-rich environments on a neonatal unit, through supported approaches including staff and family education, can enable parents to sustain positive communication with their infant (Petty et al, 2024).

## **Aims:**

To explore parent and neonatal nurse understanding of the factors that promote or hinder early communication and interaction between preterm infants and parents, to inform educational resource development.

## **Methods:**

Narrative interviews investigated parents' and nurses' views of the enablers and challenges of developing infant-parent communication as well as how to enhance positive and productive early interaction between infants and their parents.

## **Results:**

Parents reported that experiencing care on a neonatal unit was challenging, making it difficult to acquire necessary skills to help their baby. Different advice as to how to facilitate communication was given and gaining specific information about language development was hard. Parents worried about follow-up language development support for their infant once discharged.

All nursing staff recognised the value of helping parents to bond and develop care skills with their infants; interaction and communication were rated as being important skills. Necessary procedures such as wearing face masks were seen as prohibitive to developing a communication dynamic between infants and parents. Nurses agreed that communication was crucial but were unable to describe what they meant by "communication" from a linguistic perspective.

## **Conclusions:**

Although daily care and skin-to-skin time are not themselves communication strategies, they can be preparatory methods to support the development of positive dyadic linguistic relationships in early neonatal life. Better training and support resources about early communication, beyond foundation skills, for both neonatal staff and parents, is of paramount importance. Web-based, digital resource are being developed to facilitate this.

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### **References:**

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