



Editorial Comment

Alison L. Days, M.D.

Editor

El Paso Physician, EPCMS



Wisdom is meaningless until your own experience gives it meaning—Bergen Evens American (American lexicographer, 1904–1978)

This November, I gave birth to a daughter. I was only 35 weeks pregnant, so despite a good weight and breathing well, she was sent to intensive care. I spent the next 2 weeks visiting her everyday at the hospital. I scrubbed in and out of the unit, I asked questions about her bilirubin level, questions about the status of her blood cultures and wondered when she would be able to eat without the NG tube. I am a pediatrician and I have spent considerable amount of time in my life working with NICUs and explaining to parents why their children had to be in the NICU. However, being the parent of a premature child was a completely different story. I wavered each day between being totally confident, knowing that she was progressing well, and being fearful of all the complications I knew could occur. I was the only one in the family to visit her everyday, as my husband came down with a bad cold a few days after she was born and my older daughter was too young to visit. My mother helped ferry me around and gave support as I dealt with my own recovery. My baby finally came home after all tests were negative and she had demonstrated her ability to eat by mouth and maintain her temperature in an open crib. Now, even as I write this editorial, I am home enjoying the company of a baby again and marveling at the miracle of human life.

This birth was a very poignant one for me, as she is actually my third child. In January of 2009, I also gave birth to a daughter prematurely, but she did not live long enough to make it to the NICU. I feel that each of my experiences with pregnancy and birth has made me a stronger person and a more caring pediatrician. After my first daughter was born (healthy and on time), I learned how to speak with parents about problems they were having with their children or about developmental milestones with more authority and personal knowledge. After the loss of my daughter in 2009, I was able to be more empathetic and supportive to families with similar experiences. Now that I've personally experienced the NICU as a parent, I can relate to families of premature babies better. I understand the strain that having a premature child can place on a family and the issues that may arise with that child in ways I could never claim to in the past.

This holiday season I encourage everyone to spend time with a child. Spend more time with your own children or grandchildren, volunteer at a school or homeless shelter, give to various children's charities or perform a random act of kindness for a young person

in your life. Teach and learn from a child. Be a role model. You will emerge unquestionably enriched.

What a child doesn't receive he can seldom later give —P.D. James (English crime writer; b. 1920)

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