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OUR MISSION: DELIVER AN OUTSTANDING PATIENT CARE EXPERIENCE BY A PASSIONATE COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Local Parent Group Launches Campaign to Highlight Challenges of Preterm Babies

Windsor, ON - The birth of a baby is a joyous occasion in any family, but for some families, complications and stress-filled months and years arise, when that newborn arrives early.

November 17th is World Prematurity Day and the Windsor Regional Hospital NICU Family Advisory Care Team (FACT) is promoting the day to raise awareness of the challenges facing families with a preterm baby.

The group of passionate parents created a seven-day social media campaign, each day with a different theme, to highlight the work done in the WRH NICU, some of its programs, family profiles and to draw attention to the staff who work in the NICU. The messages will be shared on the Windsor Regional Hospital social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram starting November 11th.

Around the world, one in ten babies is born preterm, which is considered to be less than 36 weeks. At Windsor Regional Hospital, between 230 and 250 preterm babies are born annually and admitted to the NICU.

Dr. Sajit Augustine, Neonatologist and FACT staff member, says one of the biggest challenges facing preterm babies is survival since the world's number one killer of young children is preterm birth, having overtaken infectious diseases in recent years. Each year, over 1 million children under 5 years of age die from direct complications of being born before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy.

“The stress of giving birth to a preterm baby who is so small, many of them less than 1,000 grams (2.2 lbs) and the stress of having to deal with the immediate complications like breathing problems, feeding & nutrition, brain injuries and infection followed by the prolonged stay in the NICU sometimes for 14 weeks or more. It is incredibly stressful and overwhelming for families,” says Dr. Augustine.

He points out the NICU has an incredible survival rate at discharge to home with no mortalities in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Sadly, there were a few deaths reported in 2019 with preterm babies due to complications.

The NICU at Windsor Regional Hospital is considered a ‘modified level III’ unit which means it is capable of caring for babies at 26 weeks gestation and above, but it does not have surgical facilities, hence the ‘modified’ level status.

On December 28th, 2017, Ashley Paterson, who is also the co-chair of FACT, gave birth to twin girls who were born ten weeks early and spent 76 days in the NICU. When finally discharged from the hospital, the struggles continued at home to feed one of the daughters who has a G-Tube, which to this date, requires follow-up appointments.

“It’s been a challenge. At first, it was terrifying to be honest,” she says. “But then you develop a new normal and then it becomes a chronic stress. We continuously have struggled with my daughter’s feeding. For the first 1.5 years, she threw up all the time and weight gain was a concern.”

In the back of her mind, Paterson says there is a constant worry about how this is going to impact her daughters in the long-term, questioning whether they have a learning disability, will they struggle in school as they are tiny in comparison to their peers and half the size.

Through the social media campaign, Paterson along with other FACT members, hope to draw attention to the long-term consequences facing premature babies and families as well as raising awareness of the programs and services provided by the NICU.

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