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JANUARY edition | 2025



Dear friends and supporters of EFCNI,

A new year has begun, and with it come new opportunities to shape the future of newborn health. As we look ahead, we are inspired by the extraordinary efforts within our network to support healthcare professionals. Across Europe, patient and parent organisations are hosting workshops on mental health for neonatal staff, recognising that healthy, supported caregivers are essential for the best outcomes for preterm and sick babies.

On a hopeful note, we are excited to spotlight the upcoming PREMSTEM Conference in May, which will reveal groundbreaking advances in stem cell research for neonatal brain repair. This event promises to bring together leading minds and fresh ideas for the future of neonatal medicine.

Warm regards,

Silke Mader and the EFCNI team

EFCNI



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HONORING A PIONEER IN NEONATAL CARE

In memory of Professor Berndt Urlesberger (1961–2024)

It is with great sadness that we learned of the sudden death of Professor Berndt Urlesberger, a world-renowned authority in the field of neonatal care. Professor Urlesberger's pioneering work in non-invasive monitoring and neonatal resuscitation redefined standards and shaped practices worldwide. As head of the Division of Neonatology at the Medical University of Graz, his visionary leadership transformed it into a world-renowned centre of innovation and compassionate care. For more than a decade, he contributed significantly to international guidelines for

newborn resuscitation, leaving an indelible mark on neonatal science and practice. Beyond his professional achievements, Berndt Urlesberger will be remembered for his warmth, humour, and unwavering commitment to improving the lives of preterm infants. His legacy continues to inspire all who knew him, and he will be greatly missed. Please note that the linked obituary is in German.

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RESEARCH INTO NEONATAL BRAIN REPAIR

Register now for the PREMSTEM Conference

Discover cutting-edge research into the use of mesenchymal stem cells as a potential treatment for brain injury associated with preterm birth at the PREMSTEM Conference, taking place in Barcelona from 13-15 May 2025. Learn about PREMSTEM's findings after 5.5 years of dedicated research, attend keynote speeches and scientific sessions that will present innovative future applications, and explore alternatives to stem cells. A dedicated session will discuss the importance of involving stakeholders, such as parents, in neonatal research, with EFCNI proudly representing the patient and parent perspective. This conference is a unique opportunity to network with leading researchers, medical professionals, and patient and parent advocates in the field. Flexible participation options are available, allowing you to attend in person or via live stream. If you are interested in attending, speaking, or presenting a poster, registration and abstract submission are now open.

PREMSTEM has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 874721.

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Network



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SUPPORTING SELF-CARE

Strengthening resilience among Ukraine's healthcare workers

Amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, healthcare workers face extraordinary challenges, from resource shortages to the emotional toll of supporting families in crisis. Recognising the critical need for mental and emotional resilience, our partner patient organisation "Ranni Ptashky" ("Early Birds NGO"), in collaboration with the Ukrainian Midwives Union and with support from USAID's Public Health System Recovery and Resilience Activity led by Pact, launched a groundbreaking project to prevent professional burnout among neonatal and

obstetric healthcare workers. This initiative combines creative activities, psycho-social support, and structured training to empower healthcare workers to prioritise self-care. Over the course of 12 months, the project aims to reach 800 professionals across five regions, fostering a culture of well-being and resilience. The “train-the-trainer” approach will ensure long-term impact, equipping healthcare teams with tools to sustain these efforts across 20 territorial communities in Ukraine.

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MENTAL HEALTH FOCUS

Cultivating resilience: Supporting NICU nurses in Hungary

Recognising the immense pressures faced by neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) nurses, our partner patient organisation in Hungary, “Melletted a Helyem Association” hosted a transformative three-day workshop. Supported by the Hungarian Neonatal Society and the Generali THSN programme, the event centred on mental health, resilience, and practical strategies for navigating the challenges of NICU work. Participants explored topics such as assertive communication, stress management, and resilience through role-playing, group discussions, and mindfulness meditation. The sessions also tackled the challenging issues of workplace bullying and burnout, equipping nurses with tools for self-care and strategies to create healthier work environments. Feedback from the 80 participants highlighted the workshop’s impact, with many describing it as a “meaningful and enlightening experience”. As one nurse reflected, “This workshop was like watering a wilted flower”. Plans for continuing this vital programme into 2025 are already underway, reaffirming the commitment to improving staff well-being and, by extension, patient care.

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SPECIALIST CONFERENCE IN SWITZERLAND

Empowering parental roles in neonatology

Our partner parent organisation “Frühchen & Neokinder Schweiz” (“Preemies and NICU kids Switzerland”) hosted its second specialist conference, uniting parents and experts, including neonatologists, nurses, and therapists. Professor Heiko Reutter delivered a keynote on nutrition for preterm infants, and workshops explored current and future parental roles in neonatology. This interdisciplinary exchange inspired innovative ideas for neonatal care and strengthened collaboration between parents and professionals. Congratulations to “Frühchen & Neokinder Schweiz” for

facilitating such meaningful discussions and laying the groundwork for future projects.

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Science



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UNIVERSAL RSV PROPHYLAXIS – STUDY RESULTS

Breaking barriers in RSV prevention for all infants

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) poses a significant threat to infants, often leading to severe respiratory infections and hospitalisations. A recent study in Galicia, Spain, demonstrates the remarkable efficacy of nirsevimab, a long-acting monoclonal antibody. Findings show that this breakthrough treatment reduces RSV-related hospitalisations by more than 70%, offering strong protection against severe cases. It also lowers the risk of broader respiratory conditions such as bronchiolitis. With coverage exceeding 90% of eligible infants and a clear cost-effectiveness, nirsevimab paves the way for universal RSV prevention. This innovative approach is poised to impact infant healthcare on a global scale.

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EXPLORING E-HEALTH SOLUTIONS

To what extent can parental mental health benefit from telemedicine?

Parental mental health is intricately tied to family well-being, with poor parental mental health posing long-term risks for both parents and children. This link becomes even more critical when parents face the emotional and psychological challenges of having a newborn hospitalised in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). A recent Dutch study highlights the potential of telemedicine interventions, such as eHealth applications, in alleviating stress and anxiety in this context. These online tools offer a range of functionalities, from guided relaxation exercises to virtual support networks, providing parents with accessible and effective means to manage their mental health. As healthcare continues to embrace digital innovation, eHealth solutions can play a pivotal role in supporting parental well-being during their most vulnerable moments.

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FAMILY DYNAMICS



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Emphasising siblings' experiences when a preterm baby joins the family

The hospitalisation of a preterm newborn in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) poses significant challenges for the entire family. While research has extensively documented the impact on parental quality of life, less attention has been paid to the well-being of siblings. A recent Finnish study sheds light on how changes in family dynamics and reduced parental attention following the birth of a preterm baby affect siblings. The findings reveal a spectrum of reactions, from frustration and anxiety to feelings of protectiveness and the assumption of a caregiving role. These diverse responses highlight the importance of addressing the emotional needs of siblings to ensure that they feel supported during this transformative period for their family.

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European Standards of Care for Newborn Health



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VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

Advocating for better care: Insights from the PPPAB

The Parent, Patient, and Public Advisory Board (PPPAB) is a vital part of the European Standards of Care for Newborn Health (ESCNH). Comprising parents and advocates, the PPPAB ensures the patient voice is represented in setting standards for preterm and ill newborn care. In two exclusive videos, PPPAB members share their motivations and highlight the importance of lived experience in shaping neonatal care. From improving communication to transforming healthcare systems, their insights inspire collaboration between families and professionals. Watch their stories to understand how personal experiences and professional expertise combine to create safer, more effective care.

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CARE PROCEDURES

Implementing better standards for care procedures in neonatology

This month, we also feature two expert interviews highlighting the importance of European-wide standards for “Care procedures” in neonatal care. Monique Oude Reimer-van Kilsdonk (Chair) and Foteini Andritsou (Vice Chair) discuss how these standards address inequalities, ensuring every preterm and ill infant receives the highest quality of care. The experts emphasise key factors for successful implementation, including the need for training and education, translation of the standards into national languages, and the development of national strategies that prioritise newborn and maternal health. They also underline the necessity of functional assessment tools to evaluate compliance and progress within neonatal units. These insights underscore the collective effort required to bridge the gap between established standards and their application in daily practice.

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TEMPERATURE MANAGEMENT FOR PRETERM NEWBORNS

Transforming neonatal care with innovative strategies

Maintaining normothermia in preterm infants is a critical challenge, as both hypothermia and hyperthermia can lead to severe complications. While skin-to-skin contact in the delivery room fosters parental bonding and offers notable benefits, it may not fully ensure thermal stability for these fragile newborns. Recent advances, including radiant heat devices and mobile resuscitation trolleys, are transforming neonatal care by enhancing thermal regulation. These innovative strategies highlight the importance of a holistic approach to safeguarding the health and well-being of the most vulnerable infants, offering hope for improved outcomes in neonatal intensive care settings.

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