

SKIN-TO-SKIN CARE IN NORDIC NICU'S - A SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

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Background and aims: Skin-to-skin contact (SSC) has positive physiological and psychological effects and is implemented in neonatal care to various degree all over the world. Little is known though, to what extent and for which populations. The primary aim of this study was to investigate the level of implementation of SSC in the Nordic countries, and secondary to explore some of the barriers against and facilitators of SSC.

Methods: Two questionnaires were constructed, one to the head nurse of every NICU and one to all staff members beginning their shift during a selected 24-hour period. The staff questionnaire was partly inspired by the Kangaroo Care Questionnaire (Engler, 2002). The questionnaires were sent to every NICU in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden (n=109) where a total of 1 446 staff questionnaires were distributed.

Results: The response rate for the staff survey was 72 %. All responding NICUs provided SSC for infants and their parents, on average 3-6 hours a day, but the proportion of units having guidelines for this varied from 28 to 62 % between the countries. The most common benefit of SSC, mentioned by the staff members was that it improved the infants' general development. Lack of stability in an infant was the main reason for not providing SSC.

Conclusions: Skin-to-skin care was provided in all Nordic NICUs but to varying extent and often without guidelines. Policies and practices varied between the countries which implies a need for common Nordic guidelines for skin-to-skin care in neonatology.