

## Maternal Participation in Caring for Newborns in an NICU

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### ABSTRACT

*The idea of maternal participation in caring for newborns in an NICU has been embraced into many hospitals nowadays. However, the caring practices used in NICU often intimidate the mother in performing her role. The purpose of this study is to understand and describe maternal participation in caring for newborns in an NICU. Non-participant observation and in-depth interview were used to collect the data in this qualitative research. 12 Thai mothers of newborns admitted to an NICU of a tertiary hospital in northern Thailand were recruited in this study as informants. Maternal participation is a continuous process, consisting of two phases; the initiation of participation and the best on-going actions for the sake of the baby. Moreover, mothers provided seventeen activities to the baby in both phases. These activities can be divided into two groups based on mothers' intentions: activities intended to give warmth and encouragement to the babies and activities intended to ensure the babies' safety.*

**Key words:** Maternal participation, Caring for newborns in NICU, Critically-ill newborns, NICU

### INTRODUCTION

The babies in an NICU have to be separated from their mothers to be under the care of medical staff for long periods (Whitfield, 2003) due to prematurity and abnormality which are major causes of their illnesses, requiring special treatments and NICU medical equipment (Ehrenkranz, 2006). Such departure since the babies' birth not only interrupts the attachment process between the mothers and the babies (Schenk et al., 1992) but also brings suffering, stress and anxiety to the mothers (Holditch-Davis and Miles, 2000; Neu, 2004; Franck et al., 2005). As a result, the babies are often at a greater risk for cognitive and developmental problems, failure to thrive syndrome, parental abuse and neglect (Pillitteri, 1999; Hunter and Maunder, 2001; Aucott et al., 2002; Browne, 2003; Vorria et al., 2003; Ree, 2005). On the other hand, the mothers often depress and have problem in developing their role (Bell, 1992; Holditch-Davis and Miles, 2000; Hummel, 2003; Whitfield, 2003; Neu, 2004).