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New Guidelines Released for the Care of Late Preterm Infants

Late preterm infants at higher risk for short- and long-term health challenges requiring increased levels of assessment and care

Binghamton, NY November 16, 2012 In conjunction with tomorrow's National Premature Infant Awareness Day, the National Perinatal Association announced today the release of the *Multidisciplinary Guidelines for the Care of Late Preterm Infants*, created to deliver evidence-based instructions and tools on the management and care of late preterm infants – an often underserved, yet at risk group.

Developed in collaboration with more than 20 healthcare professionals and organizations, the guidelines address care from the in-hospital setting immediately after birth, through the transition to home, and beyond.

“Late preterm infants have been referred to as ‘little imposters’ because in most cases they look and seem normal, at least at first. We are continuing to find, however, that these babies have increased problems with breathing, feeding, temperature instability, and jaundice. And, because all organ systems are 4-6 weeks immature, they are at higher risk for health and developmental problems throughout childhood” said Dr. Raylene Phillips, Guidelines Steering Committee Chair and Neonatologist with Loma Linda University Children's Hospital.

More than 500,000 babies are born prematurely each year in the United States of which 75 percent are late preterm infants – those born between 34 and 36 6/7 weeks gestational age. Often disguised as a smaller version of a term infant, late preterm infants have higher rates of morbidity and mortality than full term babies, account for up to 20% of all NICU admissions, and are more likely to be re-hospitalized within the first 2 weeks of life.

Late preterm infants also have higher costs across every medical category compared to full-term infants, including inpatient hospitalizations, well-baby physician office visits, outpatient hospital services, home health services and prescription drug use.

Despite these facts, the increased risks of late preterm infants are usually not factored into regular hospital care or discharge planning. The need for additional education and support often goes unrecognized by healthcare providers, insurers, educators and even parents.

Because there are no standardized guidelines for the care of late preterm infants, the National Perinatal Association set out to facilitate the creation of evidence-based multidisciplinary guidelines to help inform healthcare providers and parents about optimal care for these vulnerable babies. Including input from physicians, midwives, nurses, therapists, social workers, case managers and parents, these guidelines now provide a roadmap that offers guidance across the continuum of care including sections on: In-Hospital Assessment and Care, Transition to Outpatient Care, Short-Term Follow-Up Care and Long-Term Follow-Up Care.

“These are guidelines that can improve and even save lives, so it is critical that we build awareness of them not only among healthcare providers, educators and insurers across the country, but also with parents who aren’t aware of the risks their babies may face.” Sharon Chesna, Executive Director, Mothers & Babies Perinatal Network of South Central New York, Inc.

“As a parent of a late preterm infant, I have a first-hand account of the issues and unknowns that parents face. Unfortunately, I was unaware and uneducated about the challenges my daughter was statistically prone to encounter. The new NPA Guidelines will help pave the way for greater understanding of how parents can support their late preterm babies each step of the way” said Kelli Kelley parent of late preterm infant Lauren and Founder/Executive Director of Hand to Hold.

The guidelines will be regularly updated as new information becomes available and are available free of charge in an easy-to-navigate pdf format that can be accessed at <http://www.nationalperinatal.org/lptguidelines.php>

About the National Perinatal Association

The National Perinatal Association is an organization of multidisciplinary experts and specialists that provides a single voice across the spectrum of perinatal care by facilitating information sharing, education, integrated policy positions and care guidelines to advance perinatal care.