

Co-Bedding of Twins or Higher Order Multiples

The existing scientific data are insufficient to either support or refute implementation of the practice of co-bedding twins or higher order multiples (e.g., triplets, quadruplets). It is the position of the National Association of Neonatal Nurses (NANN) that co-bedding cannot be endorsed until further research is available. NANN also believes that neonatal units that choose to implement co-bedding should do so after developing a clinical evaluation protocol to be used in collecting data on the risks and benefits of the practice.

Literature Review

Co-bedding (also called double bunking) is the placement of twins or higher order multiples in the same crib, bed, or incubator. Although the practice has been gaining in popularity as a developmental intervention, only ten articles on the topic appear in the medical literature (Altimier & Lutes, 2001; Armpriester, 1999; Bingham, 1997; DellaPorta, Aforismo, & Butler-O'Hara, 1998; Gannon, 1999; Lutes, 1996; Lutes & Altimier, 2000; Nygvist & Lutes, 1998; Swinth, Nelson, Hadeed, & Anderson, 2000). Three of them (Armpriester; Bingham; Gannon) are short reports describing the practice of co-bedding. Two (Lutes; Lutes & Altimier) provided an overview of the proposed benefits, challenges, and basic procedure. The remaining three (DellaPorta et al.; Nygvist & Lutes; Swinth et al.) are case reports describing the implementation of co-bedding in neonatal intensive care units. One (Touch, Epstein, Pohl, & Greenspan, 2002) explored the sleep patterns of infants who are co-bedded.

Published articles on co-bedding are for the most part based on anecdotal reports. Many reports focus on small groups of multiples and do not include long-term follow up (Altimier & Lutes, 2001; DellaPorta et al., 1998; Swinth et al., 2000).

The possible relationship of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and co-bedding was also researched in preparing this position statement.

Conclusion

From the standpoint of developmental theory, the underlying principles of co-bedding may be reasonable. However, the benefits and risks of the practice have not been systematically studied. Reported benefits have not been substantiated by controlled clinical studies. Among the concerns that must be investigated are the risk of medication

or treatment errors, exposure to unnecessary oxygen, sleep disruption, infection, and temperature-control problems (Hauck et al., 2003; Mosko, Richard, McKenna, & Drummond, 1996; Touch et al., 2002). A task force report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP, 2005) indicates that the risk of SIDS may be increased when siblings share a bed. The incidence of SIDS is highest among premature infants and infants 2–4 months of age.

Before discharge, parents should be apprised of the lack of documentation about co-bedding at home. Currently there is no published research on home co-bedding. Parents should be educated in Back-to-Sleep principles and made aware of the increased incidence of SIDS among infants sharing sleep surfaces with other children (AAP, 2005; Hauck et al., 2003; Mosko et al., 1996).

References

- Altimier, L., & Lutes, L. (2001). Co-bedding quadruplets. *Newborn and Infant Nursing Reviews, 1*(4), 205–206.
- American Academy of Pediatrics Task Force on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. (2005). Changing concept of sudden infant death syndrome: Diagnostic coding shifts, controversies regarding the sleeping environment, and new variables to consider in reducing risk. *Pediatrics, 116*, 1245–1255.
- Armpriester, T. (1999). Co-bedding twins/multiples together. *Journal of Newborn Nursing, 2*(1), 9.
- Bingham, R. (1997). Let's spend the night together...co-bedding. *Neonatal Network, 16*(2), 54.
- DellaPorta, K., Aforismo, D., & Butler-O'Hara, M. (1998). Co-bedding of twins in the neonatal intensive care unit. *Pediatric Nursing, 24*, 529–531.
- Gannon, J. (1999). From womb mates to roommates: Co-bedding in the NICU. *Nursing Spectrum (Greater Chicago ed.), 12*(10), 22.
- Hauck, F. R., Herman, S. M., Donovan, M., Iyasu, S., Merrick, M. C., Donoghue, E., et al. (2003). Sleep environment and the risk of sudden infant death syndrome in an urban population: The Chicago Infant Mortality Study. *Pediatrics, 111*, 1207–1214.
- Lutes, L.M. (1996). Bedding twins/multiples together. *Neonatal Network 15*(7), 61–62.

