



**National
Association of
Neonatal
Nurses**

NANN Mission Statement

NANN is THE professional voice that shapes neonatal nursing through excellence in practice, education, research and professional development.



The National Association of Neonatal Nurses (NANN) sets the standard for the neonatal profession.

NANN represents the community of neonatal nurses who provide evidence-based care to high-risk neonatal patients. NANN is recognized in the profession as the expert voice that influences standards of practice for neonatal nursing through advocacy, collaboration, and leadership.

Approximately 40,000 low-birthweight infants are born annually in this country. Due to significant medical advances and the physicians and nurses who provide for very vulnerable babies, survival rates are 10 times better now than they were 15 years ago. Neonatal nursing is a specialty in which technology and high-touch caring are interwoven to help infants and families.

Neonatal nurses provide nursing care to a very vulnerable population in an environment that is respectful of others, adaptive to change and accountable for outcomes. NANN provides leadership for neonatal nurses to improve outcomes for neonates and their families. NANN is the only national nonprofit association created by neonatal nurses for neonatal nurses.

What is Neonatal Nursing?

Neonatal nursing is a subspecialty of nursing that works with newborn infants born with a variety of problems ranging from prematurity, birth defects, infection, cardiac malformations and surgical problems. The neonatal period is defined as the first month of life; however, these newborns are often sick for months. Neonatal nursing generally encompasses those infants who experience problems shortly after birth; however, it also encompasses care for infants who experience long term problems related to their prematurity or illness after birth. A few neonatal nurses may care for infants up to about 2 years of age. Most neonatal nurses care for infants from the time of birth until they are discharged from the hospital.

What Is It Like To Be A Neonatal Nurse?

There are many career options for neonatal nurses. Many start out as staff nurses caring for critically ill newborns. As a staff nurse you may provide highly technical care

for very critically ill infants or supportive care for convalescent or mildly ill newborns. An average day may have you assisting a new mom with breastfeeding her infant, caring for a very ill term infant on a ventilator and numerous IV medications, or attending the delivery of a very small and premature infant. You will find many opportunities to work with parents and families as they learn how to care for their infants, and to integrate parents into the critical care that you provide. There is tremendous satisfaction in watching some of the smallest and sickest babies stabilize, grow and ultimately go home with their families.

As you become more experienced in your neonatal nursing role there are many opportunities to grow and expand your practice. After working with neonates for a period of time many neonatal nurses choose to take a national certification test to validate their knowledge. You may choose to be part of a neonatal transport team or participate on an ECMO (extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation) team that provides heart-lung bypass for critically ill infants. You may develop leadership skills as a charge nurse or stabilization nurse in moderate or high risk deliveries. You will find that you learn something every day when you work in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

There are other roles in working with newborns, as well. Neonatal nurse practitioners are advanced practice nurses who work with the physicians and nursing staff to provide comprehensive critical care to the infants in the NICU. This role requires additional schooling in a master's or doctoral program. In this role you share your expertise with a multidisciplinary team as you take on the medical management for a group of critically ill infants. You become skilled in procedures such as line placements, intubations, lumbar punctures, and newborn resuscitation. NNPs often provide education to nurses, house staff and other members of the neonatal team.

There are also career opportunities to advance as a nurse manager, nurse educator, clinical nurse specialist, or developmental care specialist. Nurse managers provide leadership for the staffing and administration of the NICU, ensuring the environment and resources needed for quality patient care are available. Nurse educators and clinical nurse specialists are advanced practice nurses who provide educational programs and support to both nursing staff and ancillary staff so that they provide care that is up to date and based on the best available evidence. Clinical nurse specialists may also provide direct patient care at the bedside, and support staff who are learning clinical skills. Developmental care specialists are nurses who have studied the developmental care of sick and preterm infants. They provide direct care and assist their colleagues in meeting the developmental needs of these special babies. Other nurses may work in developmental follow-up, research, or with specialized populations of infants.

How Do I Prepare To Be A Neonatal Nurse?

The first thing you must do if you want to be a neonatal nurse is to go to an accredited school of nursing. Basic nursing education can be achieved through 3 routes. The baccalaureate degree is earned through a college or university and generally takes 4 years to obtain. This route permits the greatest amount of flexibility in your career path.

An associate degree can be obtained in 2 to 3 years through a junior or community college. A diploma degree can be obtained through a hospital based school of nursing. However, diploma programs are being phased out in most areas of the country. The few that are left are often affiliated with a community college, which gives more flexibility for continuing on toward a bachelor's degree. If you have a degree in another field, you may be eligible for an accelerated program, whereby you can obtain a BSN or MSN in 1-2 years. If you want to pursue an advanced practice role, you will need to obtain a master's or doctoral degree and therefore need a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite. In the near future, a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree will be required to work as an advanced practice nurse. This is a practice-focused doctorate which will require you to have a Bachelor's degree prior to entrance into the program. Some nurses who have a Master's degree choose to pursue a PhD, which is a research focused doctorate.

Once you are a registered nurse, you need to find a hospital with a NICU. Some units require experience in infant care in order to work in the NICU and may require you to work in Pediatrics or in a well newborn nursery prior to transferring to the NICU. However, most units will hire new graduate nurses with a strong interest in neonatal intensive care and have orientation programs that teach you how to care for sick infants. There are also a variety of educational programs that provide introductory information about neonatal care. If you plan to go on to become a NNP you should make sure you practice in a level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit as a staff nurse before applying to graduate school. These units provide the most highly skilled care to the sickest of infants.

As you grow professionally or progress through your undergraduate education, we recommend joining the National Association of Neonatal Nursing (NANN). This provides you with the tools, information and standards you need to practice. It also provides you with a professional neonatal nursing journal so that you can keep up to date in your field. You may also want to purchase some basic neonatal nursing texts to provide a ready reference for you if this is not available at your job.



For more information about neonatology or nursing education in general, see the following websites:

www.NANN.org
www.discovernursing.com
www.neonatology.org
www.aanp.org
www.aap.org

[What Can I Expect As A Neonatal Nurse?](#)

Most neonatal nurses work in hospital settings. A few have positions in the community providing home care or follow-up of high risk infants. When you work in the hospital you

may work in a level II nursery with less acute or convalescing infants. You may also work in a level III nursery with the most critical patients. There are several types of level II and III nurseries based on the medical needs of the infants. Staffing levels in NICUs vary, depending on the acuity of the infant. Generally, staff ratios range from 1:1 to 1:4. This means you may care for one to four patients based on how sick they are.

Neonatal critical care is provided around the clock, and on weekends and holidays. Many neonatal nurses work 12 hour day or night shifts; however some nurseries offer 8 and 10 hour shifts or other flexible alternatives. Salaries vary regionally, and advanced practice nurses are compensated at a higher level. There is also additional compensation for nights and weekends. For specific information in a particular geographic region, contact the hospitals where you are interested in working. For information on wages by occupation and region, refer to this website: www.bls.gov/bls/blswage.htm

Neonatal Nursing allows you to make a difference in the lives of infants and their families. Many neonatal nurses continue to hear from families and infants they have cared for throughout their lives. Neonatal nurses are the voice for the smallest and sickest of patients that have no voice. Consider a rewarding career in the neonatal nursing field and help make a difference.

Founded in 1984, the National Association of Neonatal Nurses (NANN) represents the community of neonatal nurses that provides evidence-based care to high-risk neonatal patients. With over 7,000 members, NANN is recognized as the expert voice that influences standards of practice through advocacy, education, networking, collaboration, and leadership. Its newest membership division, the National Association of Neonatal Nurse Practitioners (NANNP) gives NNPs a distinct voice within NANN to address career development and educational needs and provides representation for neonatal advanced practice issues in the larger nursing community.

As a professional nursing association, NANN supports its members by sponsoring an annual conference and publishing *Advances in Neonatal Care*, a bimonthly peer-reviewed, professional journal. NANN is headquartered in Glenview, IL. For more information, visit our Web site, www.nann.org.

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