

HEALTHY LIVING

Doctors see community benefit in newborn home-visits

BY JEANNINE SATO
Durham Connects

Regular health check-ups are a necessity for a healthy community. This is especially true for expectant mothers and newborns. So when the Durham Family Initiative teamed up with the Durham County Health Department to create a home visiting program for newborns, its creators knew that a key to success was partnership with primary care providers.

"The first few weeks at home with a newborn are very difficult for parents, whether it is a first child, or a subsequent one," said Amanda O'Briant, women's Health Nurse Practitioner with Harris & Smith. "A particularly vulnerable time for moms and families is between the first pediatric visit and the mother's six-week check at their obstetric



provider's office. This is a wonderful service that can fill the gap and help support them."

A goal of the Durham Connects newborn home-visiting program is to compliment prenatal care and well-baby visits. By acting as a continuum of care "bridge" between hospitals and doctors, Durham Connects can incorporate new parents and their children into the community to keep us all healthy and prosperous.

"This partnership is important to foster continuity of care," said Prenatal Care Supervisor at Lincoln Community Health



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Center, Joyce Jiggetts. "It will close the gap between discharge and the first newborn well-baby check up. It will give the patient reassurance that

she won't be left all alone after discharge from the hospital."

It is for this reason that Durham Connects has partnered with local ob-

stetricians, pediatricians and family practitioners to bolster program participation.

The vision of Durham Connects is to create a universal model of preventive care from the earliest days of life. It is a concept that has made many health care providers say "What took so long?"

"There is something wonderful in having someone take the time to visit you at home," said Latino Health Project coordinator, Rebecca Reyes. "Home visits are times of getting to know the patient in their space. It allows the patient to share their values, culture, music and food through home visits ... health education and health care becomes holistic."

Just as early prenatal care can help determine the birth weight and overall health of a child, see **CONNECTS** | page C6

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post-partum care can help shape the health of a baby's growing brain architecture. It is never too early to start thinking about good health, for mothers, children and the community as a whole. The Durham Connects home visit is slower paced than a typical doctor's office visit and may take up to one to two hours as guided by the parent. For Chief of Duke Family Medicine Wood Warburton, M.D. the complimentary visit is a no-brainer.

"The home is the perfect place to answer questions and provide guidance for care of the newborn," said Dr. Warburton. "The physician's office is usually rushed, can be chaotic, and is not a comfortable setting for most moms and newborns. As a practice, we try to provide patient-centered care and the best place to do that, if resources are available, is the home. We're fortunate in Durham to have the resources of Durham Connects."

Of course, Durham Connects does not replace well-baby visits, but rather, complements it. Dr. Warburton sees clinical value in doctors collaborating with home-visiting nurses. The team approach ensures that each new family feels supported by the community while getting the best care possible.

"Durham Connects nurses are the eyes and ears of the primary providers outside the office. As providers we may ask about the home setting, but Durham Connects actually visits the home and can supplement the primary providers care. This can be invaluable."

Because change occurs so fast in children, parents may not recognize the need for extra care in between office visits. Pediatric nurse, Barbara Donadio of Duke Children's Primary Care also sees Durham Connects as a useful tool in filling in the gaps to improve overall health. "The partnership that our practice has with Durham Connects helps us to better support parents of newborns during a time that can be challenging

can benefit from Durham Connects. For some parents developing a back-to-work plan or understanding childcare choices may be areas a home-visiting nurse can help. For others, coping with infant crying, post-partum depression or infant feeding issues may take precedence. If nothing else, speaking with a caring nurse who is there to listen and support new parents can be of great value.

The convenience and comfort of nurse home-visits has been especially helpful to underserved communities such as immigrants, those without transportation or simply those who are not eager to transport their newborn into an unfamiliar environment.

"Ninety percent of my patient population is Spanish speaking" said Reyes. "Durham Connects provides a welcome to the patient and in a significant way. It assists the patient to learn about the health care resources in the community. Durham Connects, educates, empowers, and invites the patient to take charge of the health for herself and her family."

During a home-visit, each registered nurse weighs and measures the baby and provides a simple physical assessment of the mother as well as one-on-one education on topics of interest to the parents. Durham Connects has the ability to make referrals to more than 200 community resources to benefit new parents, from parenting classes to lactation consultation to childcare resources. Each parent receives a new parent welcome bag filled with useful items and the peace of mind that their new family is welcomed and supported in the Durham community. Said Donadio, "The biggest compliment I can give to the Durham Connects Program is that both our doctors and new parents are asking us to how they can get this program."

For more information about Durham Connects, visit www.durhamconnects.org or call 919-668-3279.

Durham Connects is a collaboration of the Durham Family