



Crib notes connect parents with babies in neonatal intensive care unit

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By **Casandra Andrews, Press-Register**



Twins Bowen and Taylor Mayfield were born four months premature at the University of South Alabama Children's & Women's Hospital. (Photo Courtesy of Hanna Mayfield.)

MOBILE, Alabama -- When Ocean Springs resident Hanna Mayfield gave birth to twin daughters Bowen and Taylor four months early, the newborns weighed in at one pound and 15.3 ounces, respectively.

The babies spent months in the neonatal intensive care unit at the University of South Alabama Children's & Women's Hospital, as the tiny girls fought to survive. During those tense days, the Mayfields were among the first parents to receive pre-dawn text messages as part of a new program to share more medical information with families.

"As soon as my eyes opened in the morning, I would pick up my phone and read the note," Hanna said. "I was there every day and I still called at night to talk to the night nurse, but it was a great way to know they had a good night and their progress without having to pick the phone up and have to take (nurses) away from their job."

The program, known as Crib Notes, started in May at the Mobile hospital. As doctors, nurses and respiratory therapists care for some of the region's most critically underdeveloped newborns, they type details about their days and other health-related data into computers stationed throughout the unit.

That information is used to help create the text messages that are sent to dozens of parents who choose to get them. The notes, which are written from the baby's point of view, are typically sent about 5 a.m.

On any given day, there typically 80 premature and sick infants in the NICU at Children's & Women's. Some are simply gaining weight. Others are struggling to thrive.

To help their daughters, Matthew and Hannah Mayfield had the nurses position iPods in the isolets where the babies spent their first months. They were programmed to play classical piano music to help with brain development and keep their heart rates steady.

Because baby Taylor had complications after her birth, she stayed longer in the hospital than her twin. Bowen went home a little more than two months before her sister.

"They set up the email like Taylor was emailing us, which was precious," Hanna Mayfield said. "It told how much weight she gained, if she had a bath, how much she ate in the last 24 hours. And there was always a sweet note: 'Can't wait to see you today.'"

Parents are not yet able to stay in the hospital overnight with babies in the neonatal intensive care unit at Children's & Women's, USA officials said, so the texts have become a good way for families to stay more connected.

A renovation nearing completion at the hospital will almost double its size, and will add 12 family-sized rooms so parents can stay with their premature newborns.

"You don't want to disturb your nurse from your child or any other child," Hanna said. "The phone does ring constantly in there."

Nurses in the NICU said part of their job is to talk with parents about their children's progress — on the phone and in person — and that won't change. The texts are just another way to stay in touch, hospital officials said.

On May 8, the Mayfields' daughter, Taylor, left the hospital in Mobile and joined her family in Mississippi.

"We haven't had one second of trouble," Hanna Mayfield said. "Developmentally, they have come a very long way. They are home now and they are very healthy."

The twins were born in October of 2011 and are now 10 months old. The primary nurses who cared for them have all been to visit the Mississippi family, some coming regularly to give Hanna a few hours to run errands.

"We are still very close," Hanna said of the medical staff who cared for her daughters. "They are such amazing people. I can't imagine our lives not knowing these people because they are like family to us. They love our girls."

Today, the twins are meeting milestones for their adjusted age, rolling over both ways, Hanna said proudly, and cuddling with each other when they get a chance.

"They are doing great," Hanna said. Bowen is closing in on 12 pounds. Taylor, who weighed less than one pound at birth, is up to 10 1/2 pounds, her mother said.

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