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Getting to Know You: Mothers' Experiences of Kangaroo Care

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Objective: To reveal mothers' experiences of providing kangaroo care for their preterm newborns while still in the hospital.

Design: Transcendental phenomenology was used to analyze the experiences of mothers providing kangaroo care for their preterm newborns. Tape recorded, semistructured interviews were conducted 1 to 4 weeks postpartum. Mothers were asked one grand tour question, "What was it like for you to provide kangaroo care for your preterm infant while in the hospital?" This study was the qualitative component of a randomized clinical trial.

Participants: Ten women who provided kangaroo care for their preterm newborns, 32-36 completed weeks, weighing 1500-3000 grams, with APGAR scores 6 or greater at 1 minute, 7 or greater at 5 minutes.

Results: Four dominant themes emerged. The themes were reduced to one essential structure of knowing. The two essential elements of the structure of knowing were mothers kept from knowing their preterm newborn and mothers getting to know their preterm newborn.

Conclusions: Kangaroo care facilitates bonding and enhances maternal-infant acquaintance, even in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) environment. Mothers found that kangaroo care calmed them and their newborns. *JOGNN*, 34, 210-217; 2005. DOI: 10.1177/0884217504273675

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The premature birth of a child is a crisis for parents. They experience a range of emotions including fear regarding the survival of the child, disappointment about not having a full-term baby, and anxiety related to separation and decreased interaction with their newborn (Miles, Funk, & Kasper, 1992). Parents who are not given the chance to hold their newborns immediately after birth can have difficulty initiating a relationship. According to Nystrom and Axelsson (2002), physical separation of mothers from their full-term newborns causes much emotional strain. Preterm delivery most often results in early physical separation of the mother from her newborn. Klaus, Kennell, Plumb, and Zuehlke (1970) were the first to document the experiences of mothers who endured prolonged separation from their preterm newborns. Early interruptions in the acquaintance process combined with concern about the newborns' survival and long-term prognosis can interfere with the maternal-infant attachment process. After delivery, the earlier the mother holds her baby and initiates the acquaintance process, the sooner maternal-infant attachment begins (Mercer, 1995).

Kangaroo care (KC) allows mothers to hold their preterm newborns, clad only in a diaper and sometimes a cap, underneath their clothing skin-to-skin and upright between their breasts (Anderson, 1991). Knowing that preterm birth interrupts the attachment process, Affonso, Wahlberg, and Persson (1989) explored the use of KC in a prematurity care unit. They found KC had a positive impact on maternal confidence, and mothers who provided KC

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