

New technology keeps parents connected with their newborn's neonatal care

March 3 2017



The Honourable Scott Brison (left) and Dr. Marsha Campbell-Yeo at Wednesday's announcement event. Credit: Photo via Twitter @scottbrison

Over the past 30 years, Dr. Marsha Campbell-Yeo has seen incredible advancements in neonatal care—developments in technology and practice that have improved outcomes for vulnerable newborns across North America and around the world.

"However, the focus of these innovations and transformations in care has been almost exclusively directed toward [health care providers](#) and technological advancements," said Dr. Campbell Yeo, associate professor in the School of Nursing at Dal and a clinician scientist at the IWK Health Centre. "Until recently, parents have not only been underutilized in the setting of neonatal intensive care, but often excluded all together."

Getting parents involved

Dr. Campbell-Yeo and her colleagues are looking to change that. She's the academic lead of the ChezNICU Home project—an interactive virtual platform in development that lets parents and their family become more active participants in the care of their baby within the NICU ([neonatal intensive care](#) unit).

On Wednesday, the Government of Canada announced a \$3 million investment in the ChezNICU technology through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's (ACOA) Atlantic Innovation Fund. The support will help the IWK/Dal team further develop and commercialize the system.

The announcement was made at an event at the IWK Health Centre, hosted by the Honourable Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board), on behalf of the Honourable Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and Minister responsible for ACOA).

"Imagine how reassuring it will be for family members to maintain virtual contact with their children when they are unable to be with them in the hospital," said Brison. "This project will result in a universally valuable product that the IWK Health Centre can license and a key opportunity to foster new national and international collaborations."

Putting info at parents' fingertips

Nearly one in eight babies in Canada are born preterm. And researchers like Dr. Campbell-Yeo are contributing to a large and growing body of evidence showing how increased parental involvement in neonatal care improves both short- and long-term outcomes for infants and their families.

"ChezNICU Home will not replace face-to-face interaction with the [health](#)-care team, but instead strengthen relationships and augment the care provide by enhancing communication and providing accessible, standardized, up-to-date education materials," she said.

Partnering with Cisco Solutions, the IWK Health Centre's ChezNICU product will offer parents 24/7 access to information to help them navigate the complex (sometimes overwhelming) NICU environment at their own pace. They can connect and learn about their baby's care on-site, from their smartphone or tablet, or even from their home computer. The system will help parents learn at their own pace, developing confidence in being part of their baby's daily care.

"ChezNICU is a sophisticated system of digital health information, communication, teaching and support to improve the well-being and cognitive development of our most vulnerable patients while supporting their families," said Tracy Kitch, president and CEO of the IWK Health Centre. "The collective impact of this work will be realized as a result of the strong partnerships and collaborative efforts of the IWK NICU team, parents, scientists and our partners; ACOA, Dalhousie, Cisco and the IWK Foundation."

The power of partnerships

The project will also result in several research positions, including support for summer, masters and doctoral students at Dalhousie throughout the duration of the project.

"By working together, we can ensure that the research evidence generated by leading Dalhousie scientists is brought directly to the patients who need it most—and, in turn, clinicians can identify health care gaps and provide reproachers with timely and relevant research questions," added Dr. Campbell-Yeo. "The IWK and Dalhousie School of Nursing have built strong connections and are clearly making a difference in the care babies and families in Nova Scotians will receive."

Dr. Campbell-Yeo says she's grateful for the support of the partners involved, and is eager to bring the ChezNICU product to life to support parents and their families.

"ChezNICU Home is going to transform [neonatal care](#) and change the lives of infants and families at the IWK," she said. "We look forward to sharing this solution with health centres around the world and helping NICUs everywhere truly take advantage of the power of parents."

Provided by Dalhousie University

Citation: New technology keeps parents connected with their newborn's neonatal care (2017, March 3) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-03-technology-parents-newborn-neonatal.html>

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