

The High Tech, High Touch World of Julia Marchesan, NP-Paediatrics

For nurse practitioner Julia Marchesan, the best things come in the smallest packages. Julia is an NP in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at St. Joseph's Health Care in London. She cares for fragile, premature infants, many with numerous health concerns.

"It's high tech and high touch at the same time," she said. "I get to help babies go from a fragile, premature infant to a healthy baby."

In the mornings, Julia and her team, which includes registered nurses, several other NPs, neonatologists, pharmacists, a dietitian, social workers and pastoral care, round on the all the babies in the unit. Often there can be as many as 38 very fragile babies. Together, they form plans and make sure all aspects of each baby's mental and physical health is looked after.

During a typical day, Julia will assess, order labs, follow up with results, and prescribe medications for six to eight babies, sometimes more depending on her shift.

The role also enables her to perform vital procedures that help some of the smallest babies successfully make it through the first critical hours, days and weeks of their young lives. In her role, Julia inserts breathing tubes to help the babies breathe and other special tubes to ensure their nutrition is optimized. Occasionally, she inserts tubes into the chest to remove harmful air or fluid from the baby's lungs.

Additionally, Julia and her NP colleagues share on-call duties several times a month, during which time she may be called to a birth if the baby or mother is considered high-risk. Despite their best efforts to ensure the babies are kept medically stable, everything does not always progress according to plan. If a baby is not breathing when born, Julia coordinates a specialized team and begins to revive the baby until the doctor who specializes in care of premature babies, a "neonatologist", arrives.

"There are a lot of professionals on the team who can insert breathing tubes or insert special tubes, but it's my job in that role as 'coordinator' to figure out why the baby isn't breathing."

Just as important as caring for the infants on a daily basis is ensuring the parents and family members are well-informed, participate in developing plans and comfortable with the plans of care. "We give them a long-term view, especially if it's going to be a three or four month stay," she said. "We give families the information they need when they need it, as well as provide them with enough information so that they are ready for the next stage too." Julia also said education takes place right up to each baby's discharge from hospital and during follow up visits which are coordinated by one of her NP colleagues.

While dealing with sick, premature babies may not appeal to everyone, Julia is passionate about the difference she can make caring for these babies and providing support to their parents and families. "I get to care for these babies while they are in hospital, prepare them for discharge, and I often have the opportunity to see them at one year, two years, and sometimes even see them graduate from high school," she said. "It's very rewarding and the families are forever grateful."