Fairview Hospital and Austen Riggs Collaborate to Listen to Parents and Newborns Together

Fairview’s Family Birthplace is collaborating with the Human Development Strategic Initiative at the Austen Riggs Center in an effort to incorporate relationship-building skills as part of the routine care of newborns and families for all women who deliver at Fairview Hospital.

Claudia M. Gold, MD, local pediatrician, author, and Austen Riggs Center staff member, and J. Kevin Nugent, PhD, director of the Brazelton Institute, are supporting maternity nurses in instituting the Newborn Behavioral Observations (NBO) system at Fairview Hospital. The NBO is a relationship-building tool that offers, at its core, an opportunity for listening to parents and babies without judgment.

Recently, Drs. Gold and Nugent conducted an NBO training at the Austen Riggs Center for Fairview maternity nurses, local pediatricians, home visitors, family physicians, nurse practitioners, lactation consultants, and early intervention specialists with the hope that the NBO system can be instituted through the local network of pediatric care. A number of Austen Riggs staff also attended the training, including Andrew J. Gerber, MD, PhD, medical director & CEO, and Donna Elmendorf, PhD, director of the Therapeutic Community Program and Human Development Strategic Initiative leader.

The NBO consists of 18 structured neurobehavioral observations. It is a clinical application of the Neonatal Behavioral Assessment Scale developed by pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton, MD, who was among the first to observe the tremendous capacity of the newborn infant for communication and connection.

The clinicians leading the initiative stress that the NBO is not a test.

“The NBO is not an evaluation. There is no score,” notes Dr. Gold. “It assures that time is reserved during the hospital stay for parents to learn about their baby and his or her unique qualities and ways of communicating. We are hopeful that the NBO brings an opportunity to set new families on a healthy path from the start.”

Fairview maternity nurse Theresa Brewer was among those trained by Drs. Nugent and Gold. “Even though I have been a maternity nurse for over 40 years, I still learn something new every day. NBO taught me another way to relate to the family. We have a new way to help our families discover their newborn’s unique qualities and develop this important relationship from the very start.”