

Neonatal Intensive Care

Bringing a vigorous, new life into the world can be a major challenge for high-risk pregnant women.

Surviving in the womb and beyond can be equally difficult for their babies.

When University Hospital opens in February, it will house one of the most advanced neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) in the nation. "The NICU is an important component in the continuum of care that gives critically ill and premature babies the best chance at life," says neonatologist **Dr. Cherry Uy**. University of California, Irvine Medical Center also offers the only combined, university-based perinatal-neonatal program in Orange County. Perinatology involves the care of high-risk pregnant women and their fetuses; neonatology focuses on the treatment of critically



IN CARING HANDS

Perinatologist Dr. Manuel Porto, director of the Center for Fetal Evaluation, says that with expert care, 95 percent of high-risk pregnancies result in the birth of healthy babies.

ill newborns and premature infants. "The close collaboration of perinatologists and neonatologists allows the best plans to be made for maintaining a pregnancy and providing optimum care after the baby is born," says Uy.

Private NICU rooms. Formerly located in the original hospital, the Level III NICU will house 30 beds and possibly grow larger. Unlike older NICUs in which babies are placed in one large room in side-by-side specially equipped cribs, the new University Hospital neonatal intensive care

unit features mostly private rooms that comfortably accommodate a newborn and parents. There are also rooms with two or more cribs for twins and other multiple births. This quiet setting encourages bonding and breastfeeding, while reducing environmental stimulation for babies. "Newborns heal and mature better in surroundings that are more womblike," says Uy. There's also a seating alcove in each room and comfortable Kangaroo recliners for mothers. Additionally, there's a private "nesting" room with sleeping accommodations for parents and babies who plan to go home soon. This arrangement gives families a chance to care

for their child in a secure environment before trying it on their own at home.

Although the setting is beautiful, aesthetics are not as important as the advanced care that has made UC Irvine Medical Center a regional perinatal-neonatal referral center. "We have a full spectrum of subspecialists such as pediatric surgeons, cardiologists, neurologists and genetic experts to care for sick babies," says Uy. "As a result, UC Irvine Medical Center has some of the best outcomes in the nation for the management of complicated pregnancies, sick newborns and premature infants."



OUTWITTING PREMATUREITY

When 43-year-old Dana Agamalian gave birth to 2-pound, 5-ounce Grant and 2-pound, 6-ounce Alexa at a Newport Beach hospital four years ago, the babies were immediately transferred to the NICU at UC Irvine Medical Center. During the twins' 3½-month hospital stay, NICU nurses managed the babies' respirators, watched over their IV medications and monitored multiple aspects of their care. A NICU physician even gave John and Dana Agamalian his cell phone number so the doctor could answer the couple's questions night or day. Today, the twins are healthy and happy. "We received the best of care," Dana Agamalian says. "The NICU team at UC Irvine was a bunch of pros."

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