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# The quality of neonatal inter-facility transport systems within the Johannesburg Metropolitan Region

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**2012-01-17**
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/11031

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# The Quality of Neonatal Inter-Facility Transport Systems within the Johannesburg Metropolitan Region

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Medicine in Paediatrics

**Johannesburg 2011**

## Declaration

I, Mgcini Desmond Thwala declare that this research report is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Medicine in the branch of Paediatrics in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signed:

On 2nd day of July 2011

## Dedication

Praise be to God always!

I dedicate this Thesis to my wife Nompumelelo Thwala for all her support over the years and to my children, Mangaliso, Nonkazimulo and Andiswa for being who they are. Love you always.

And to my mother Mzonono Thwala and my late father Mduduzi Thwala for all your support, thank you.

## Abstract

Little is known about the clinical outcomes of neonates who are transported from one health facility to another in resource-poor settings. In resource-rich settings dedicated retrieval teams undertake most, if not all, of the neonatal transfers between different health institutions. Outcomes are often closely monitored and improvements made on a regular basis.

The aim of this study was to ascertain the clinical physiological stability of sick neonates on arrival at the receiving hospital following transport from another health facility, as a measure of the quality of transport facilities available to sick infants within the Johannesburg Metropolitan region.

Infants aged less than 28 days at the time of enrolment and referred to any of the three University of Witwatersrand academic complex paediatric hospitals were studied from October to December 2007. They were transported by either a private or public medical transport unit. Clinical physiological parameters such as oxygen saturation, heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, blood glucose and muscle tone, amongst others, were documented on arrival of the infant at the receiving hospital, as part of their routine clinical assessment.

A total of 104 retrievals were done during this period of which 96 of them are reported in our audit.

The majority (92%) of the 96 infant retrievals were made by a paramedic-led team. Common adverse clinical events noted on arrival at the receiving hospital included hypotonia (32%), hypoxia (22%), hypothermia (21%) and acidosis (in 21/52 [40%]). The mortality at 48 hours after transfer was 7%. Statistically significant predictors of mortality at 48 hours for transported infants were: bradycardia (OR 38.2, 95% CI 4.4-421, p-value 0.003), hypoxia (OR 29.6, 95% CI 3.31 - 264, p-value < 0.001), hypotension (OR 14.6, 95% CI 1.6 -165, p-value 0.008), poor rating of the transfer process by the receiving clinician (OR 10.59, 95% CI 1.60 - 87.3, p-value 0.006) and hypothermia (OR 6.08, 95% CI 1.01 - 39, p-value 0.03).

The study confirms that many infants arrive in a poor clinical condition following transfer to a referral hospital, with a relatively high mortality in the 48 hours after transfer.

## Acknowledgements

My thanks to:

- Professor Haroon Saloojee, head of Community Paediatrics, the University of Witwatersrand, for being my supervisor.
- Dr Shadi Mphahlele, neonatologist from Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, for being my co-supervisor.
- Dr Kebashni Naidoo, paediatrician from Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital, for her continued help and encouragement.
- Paediatric registrars and registered nurses at the three academic complex hospitals for their help with data collection.

# Table of Contents


| | Page |
|---|---|
| Declaration | ii |
| Dedication | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Acknowledgements | v |
| List of tables | ix - x |
| List of figures | xi |
| Nomenclature | xii – xiii |
| 1. Introduction and literature review | |
| 1.1 Background on inter-hospital transport facilities | 1 – 3 |
| 1.2 Organisation and composition of transport teams | 3 – 4 |
| 1.3 Tools for measuring quality of care rendered by the transport team | 4 – 8 |
| 1.4 Review on ambulance safety aspects | 9 |
| 1.5 Organisation of transport facilities for paediatrics in South Africa | 10 – 13 |
| 1.6 Reasons to undertake the audit | 14 |
| 2. Materials and methods | 15 |

2.1 Study objectives 15

2.2 Study design 15

2.3 Study sample 15

2.3.1 Inclusion Criteria 15

2.3.2 Exclusion criteria 16

2.4 Study period 16

2.5 Sample size 16

2.6 Data Collection 16 - 17

2.7 Study procedures 18

2.8 Outcome measures 18 - 20

2.9 Statistical considerations 20

2.12 Financial assistance 20

2.13 Ethics 20 - 21

3. Results 22 - 45

4. Discussion and conclusions 48 - 64

5. Recommendations 64 - 65

6. References 66 - 69

7. **Appendix A** – Information sheet 70 - 71

8. **Appendix B** – Parental consent form 72

9. **Appendix C** - Data capturing sheet 73 - 74

10. **Appendix D** – Ethics clearance form 75

## List of tables

**Page**


3.1 Age of infants on arrival (study entry) 23

3.2 Summary of demographic profile 25

3.3 Receiving hospitals for infants 26

3.4 Referring and recipient health institutions for infants 26 - 27

3.5 Ambulance service responsible for transfer 29

3.6 Clinical diagnosis of infants made by the referring institution 30

3.7 Summary of deaths 31

3.8 Detailed profile of infants who died within 48 hours of arrival at the receiving hospital 32 - 33

3.9 Cardio-respiratory status of infants on arrival 34

3.10 Infants admitted to Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and the mode of ventilation during transfer 34

3.11 Method of Oxygen administration during transfer 35

3.12 Profile of infants presenting with a bradycardia 36

3.13 Profile of infants presenting with hypotension 37

3.14 Summary of blood gas analysis, temperature and blood glucose of infants at the receiving hospital 39

3.15 Infants presenting with severe acidosis 40

3.16 Profile of infants with hypothermia on admission 40 – 41

3.17 Comparison between infant's body temperature and the 41

ambulance company used

3.18 Infants with a poor rating of the transfer process 43

3.19 Summary of adverse clinical physiological parameters on admission to the receiving hospital 43

3.20 Comparison of the number of adverse events documented on infants between the private and public transport teams 44

3.21 Comparison of the physiological parameters on infants transported by the two ambulance groups on arrival at the referral hospital 45

3.22 Probability of death in the presence of adverse physiological parameters 47

## List of figures

**Page**

Fig 3.1 Study flow diagram 22

Fig 3.2 Gestational age of infants at birth 24

Fig 3.3 Weight of infants at enrollment 24

Fig 3.4 Ward of admission 28

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **AAP** | American Academy of Paediatrics |
| **ANNP** | Advanced Neonatal Nurse Practitioner |
| **BLS** | Basic Life Support |
| **BP** | Blood pressure |
| **CATS** | Children's Acute Transport Service |
| **CHB** | Chris Hani Baragwanath |
| **CPAP** | Continuous Positive Airway Pressure |
| **CRIB** | Clinical Risk Index for Babies |
| **ECMO** | Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation |
| **ETT** | Endotracheal tube |
| **GEMS** | Gauteng Emergency Medical Services |
| **ICU** | Intensive Care Unit |
| **IVH** | Intraventricular Haemorrhage |
| **KMC** | Kangaroo Mother Care |
| **MINT** | Mortality Index of Neonatal Transportation |
| **MOU** | Midwife Obstetric Unit |
| **NICU** | Neonatal Intensive Care Unit |
| **OR** | Odds ratio |
| **PHC** | Primary Health Care |

| | |
|---|---|
| **PICU** | Paediatric Intensive Care Unit |
| **PIM** | Paediatric Index of Mortality |
| **SA** | South Africa |
| **SNAP** | Score for Neonatal Physiology |
| **TRIPS** | Transport Risk Index of Physiologic Stability |
| **UK** | United Kingdom |
| **USA** | United States of America |
| **WITS** | University of the Witwatersrand |