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NURSES FOR NEWBORNS BOARD PRESIDENT LINDA M. DOUGHERTY

COVER STORY

FAMILIES FIRST

NURSES FOR NEWBORNS

by stephanie wallace

A NEW BABY IS A MAJOR LIFE CHANGE FOR ANY FAMILY, but the transition can be especially challenging without necessary emotional, medical and financial support. Nurses for Newborns (NFN) was founded in 1991 to meet the needs of local families welcoming a baby. The nonprofit provides in-home nurse visits, health care assistance, education and connections to resources. “The first months can be a very stressful time for families, but they are also critical to a newborn’s growth and development,” says CEO Melinda Monroe. “We want to ensure parents are supported in their roles, and babies make it to their first birthdays and beyond, thriving and healthy.”

Families can be referred to NFN by local hospitals, clinics and social service agencies, or they can come on their own. Monroe says the organization works to help any family that has a baby and needs support. “We eliminate barriers to transportation, health care and other services that families need,” she says. The program offers home visits from nurses highly trained in maternal-infant health. They perform health assessments, prepare a plan of action for the baby’s caregiver, and educate the parents for up to two years after the child’s birth. Community health workers and licensed clinical social workers also support the complex needs of families. “The team is designed to address challenges that arise and continue what’s already going well,” Monroe explains.

Expectant mothers also can receive support. “We encourage families to start with us as early as possible,” Monroe says. “The health of the mother during and after pregnancy is vital for both her and the baby.” NFN connects pregnant women with prenatal care, helps them prepare for their babies’ arrivals and monitors their health. After birth, screenings address any physical and mental health issues, and nurses can help the family access resources when needed.

Parents also are instructed by NFN nurses on topics like infant CPR and feeding. Currently, the nonprofit has a special focus on safe sleep. Along with specific lessons on the topic, it is providing pack-and-play cribs to families who need them. “Thanks to new guidelines on safe sleep from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the incidence of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) has been cut in half,” Monroe says. “Unfortunately, not everyone is aware how the guidelines have changed.” She explains that all parents should follow the ABCs of safe sleeping. Babies should sleep alone (no stuffed animals, blankets or other items that could cover their airways), on their backs and in a safe place like a crib.

The nonprofit’s annual fundraiser, Night for Newborns, will be held Feb. 23 at The Sheldon and features a lively evening of music and auctions, including a raffle for a week in a Parisian apartment. The Champion for Families Award will be presented to entrepreneur and philanthropist Maxine Clark for her work to support vulnerable families. Monroe says the money raised by the event will go directly to fund NFN home visits. “Many of our families wouldn’t receive support if NFN didn’t exist,” she notes. “It’s really a simple equation: The more money we can raise, the more babies we can help.”

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