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The role of nurses in the prevention of blindness from retinopathy of prematurity

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The incidence of blindness from retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is increasing, particularly in middle and low income countries as services for preterm infants expand. The annual incidence of blindness and visual impairment from ROP in 2010 was estimated to be 32,200 with the greatest number being in South Asia. Nurses can play a key role in reducing the risk of blindness from ROP, by counselling mothers at risk of preterm delivery to deliver in well equipped facilities and by reducing exposure of preterm infants to the known risk factors for ROP such as sepsis (hand washing and aseptic techniques); poorly administered and monitored supplemental oxygen (setting alarms correctly; responding to alarms appropriately); reducing stress (pain control, reduce unnecessary handling, swaddling and kangaroo care) and by promoting good nutrition (human breast milk). Nurses can prepare infants for screening for ROP and assist the ophthalmologist during examination, and can counsel parents of infants who need ongoing screening after discharge from the unit of the importance of attending the appointments.

Biography

Clare Elizabeth Gilbert is working as a Professor of International Eye Health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. She has over 25 years of experience of research in low and middle income countries, focussing on blinding eye diseases of children, including retinopathy of prematurity. She is the first to describe the "third epidemic" of blindness due to ROP in middle income countries and teaches on Master's in Public Health for Eye Care; currently supervising 5 PhD students. She has over 220 peer reviewed publications and more than 20 chapters. She is a Research Advisor in Eye Health for Sightsavers, member of the Advisory Board of the Vision Impact Institute, Senior Advisor USAID Child Blindness Program and Scientific Advisor to the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust. She received American Academy of Ophthalmology's International Prevention of Blindness Award (2011), Lighthouse International's Pisart Vision Award (2012) and the L'Occitane Foundation's Sight Award (2014).

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