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Hand to Hold Launches First Podcast for Parents of Premies

“NICU Now” Audio Support Series Supports Parents who are at a Higher Risk for Depression, Anxiety, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

AUSTIN, TEXAS — February 15, 2017 — Parents of the half a million babies admitted to neonatal intensive care in the United Statesⁱ each year face higher rates of depression, anxiety* and post-traumatic stress disorder. To help parents through those difficult times, Hand to Hold today announces *NICU Now*, a free audio support series available at handtohold.org, on iTunes and Stitcher, with topics covering guilt, grief, anxiety, bonding and breastfeeding with a sick or medically fragile baby, and risk factors and warning signs for depression and more.

“Hand to Hold sees a gap in the system of care for NICU families, and we strive to develop timely, effective resources to meet the growing demand for family support in hospitals,” said Kelli Kelley, Hand to Hold co-founder and executive director, whose son was born at 24 weeks and spent four months in neonatal intensive care. “The NICU Now podcast is readily and freely available for parents who may not have the time and resources to get the support they need from a support group or counselor.”

Hosted by Kelley, NICU Now interviews health experts, medical professionals, Pulitzer Prize winning authors, popular recording artists, NICU graduates, as well as families who have been through a NICU stay. Kelley and guests discuss the range of emotions and responses that parents have following a preterm birth such as challenges associated with bonding with a medically fragile child. Episodes also include interviews with parents including Tom and Kelley French, authors of the 2016 micro preemie memoir, *Juniper, the Girl Who Was Born Too Soon*, and bereaved mom Melissa Hinnant, founder of multimillion-dollar women’s apparel company Grace and Lace.

“A NICU stay can be very isolating and parents may find it hard to attend support groups or be hesitant to talk openly with counselors. NICU Now will help them know they are not alone in their feelings and prepare them to be confident caregivers and advocates for their babies,” says Katie Pendleton, LCSW.

Kelley is familiar with the stress of having a baby in the NICU. She’s battled anxiety and PTSD since her son’s four-month NICU stay in 2000. In 2015, she suffered a concussion and had to remain still for many weeks. After listening to the Radiolab episode “23 Weeks 6 Days,” which chronicles the story of Juniper’s 196-day NICU stay, Kelley realized podcasting is a cost-effective way to reach NICU parents nationwide, and share messages of hope and inspiration.

“It was a light-bulb moment for me when I realized podcasting could expand our reach,” Kelley explains. “Hand to Hold provides excellent resources to hospitals and families, yet many hospitals are unable to financially invest in comprehensive support programs for their NICU families.”

NICU Now is based on Hand to Hold’s support group curriculum developed to help hospitals meet National Perinatal Association guidelines for psychosocial support for parents whose babies are admitted to NICU.

In 2017, Hand to Hold will launch NICU Heroes, a podcast specifically for NICU professionals, and NICU and Beyond, featuring stories of inspiration and hope about NICU graduates and their families, the medical professionals who care for them and the life transformations that often occur after a harrowing NICU stay.

NICU Now is supported by a grant from Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals and produced by Hand to Hold, which is solely responsible for its content. Other sponsors include Prolacta Bioscience and Huggies.

About Hand to Hold

Hand to Hold is a national nonprofit that helps families before, during, and after NICU stays and infant loss by providing powerful resources for the whole family, and most importantly, one-on-one mentoring from someone who has been there. Hand to Hold resources include in-hospital programs, articles and blogs, social networks, and trained peer mentors. All were designed with the emotional, physical, and social needs of the whole NICU family. Hand to Hold was the 2012 recipient of the Becky Hatfield Family Support Award, given by the National Perinatal Association. In 2015, Hand to Hold was ranked as one of the top 10 resources for NICU parents by About.com. All services are offered without charge. For more information, visit www.handtohold.org.

1 March of Dimes and National Perinatal Information Center/Quality Analytic Services. Special Care Nursery Admissions. Accessed from https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/pdfdocs/nicu_summary_final.pdf. This study showed that 14.4% of births in the U.S. are referred to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for advanced care.

Centers for Disease Control - National Center for Health Statistics. In 2012, 3,952,841 babies were born. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/births.htm>.

*Leonard, L. (1998). Depression and anxiety disorders during multiple pregnancy and parenthood. *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, 27(3), 329-337.
