



preemies

in the Camera's Eye

:: by Bill Kirby

A picture, you have likely heard, is worth a thousand words.

And so is a live camera's-eye view of your newborn. Or, if you are Chip and Molly Lewis, a live camera's-eye view of your three newborns, all born within minutes at Cape Fear Valley Medical Center.

"It was a whirlwind morning," Molly Lewis says about her Oct. 2020 delivery date, when the 30-year-old dentist gave birth to triplets. "Our minds were racing. We wondered if our babies would be healthy. But there were several medical teams with us. How miraculous the moment was, and we were thanking God they were OK."

Molly Lewis relives the moment.

"They came," she says, "one after another."

Samuel Boyd, 3 pounds, 1 ounce, was born at 10:10 a.m.; Bennett Elizabeth, 3 pounds, 6 ounces, at 10:11 a.m.; and Charley Anne, 2 pounds, 11 ounces, at 10:12 a.m.

Husband Chip was nearby.

"There's our boy!" he would exclaim to his wife at first delivery.

Molly Lewis can see a father's face.

"I could tell he was excited," she says.

But there was no time to spare.

"There's Bennett!" Chip Lewis would say. "She's beautiful! You are doing great!"

Still, no time to spare.



The babies each had a camera on their isolette. We would look in on them each morning, throughout the day, and it was the last thing we did when we went to bed at night. It allowed us peace of mind and allowed us to be connected to them.

“And then he said, ‘There’s Charley!’” Molly Lewis says. “I remember my doctor saying they are all doing great. That’s when I took a sigh of relief and said, ‘They are here.’”

Preemies born seven weeks before their anticipated arrival date, the infants immediately were taken to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), while Molly recovered from her cesarean deliveries.

But Samuel, Bennett and Charley never were far from a mother’s eyes, and all because of the NicView® cameras now in place in the medical center’s NICU that enables parents to monitor their newborns.

Foundation at Work

Cape Fear Valley Health Foundation raised more than \$140,000 at the Annual Friends of Children Golf and Tennis Classic in 2018 toward the purchase and installation of 49 NicView cameras.

NicView is an innovative, small web camera system that allows parents, family and friends to view preemies or hospitalized infants in real time, 24/7, through a secure online portal, according to Sabrina Brooks, Executive Director of Cape Fear Valley Health Foundation. Camera pods are placed at each designated isolette in the NICU and viewing of a baby’s environment is protected by encrypted transmissions.

The camera system is not meant to replace the important bonding that occurs between parents and their babies after birth. Rather, it is meant to be a complement to their in-person interaction.

Vance Townsend, co-chairman of the Friends of Children Golf and Tennis Classic is passionate about raising money for children’s services through the Health Foundation.

“My wife and I lost twin girls, who were delivered at Cape Fear Valley,” Townsend said. “And our 7-year-old twins that we have now were born at Cape Fear Valley. They spent 6 and 11 weeks in the NICU, where they received amazing care. The doctors, nurses and staff in the NICU are very special people. These events are what led us to help with fundraising for the Cape Fear Valley Foundation’s Friends of Children.”

When approached about the NicView camera system, Townsend says, he and his wife were passionate about doing all they could in the fundraising effort.

“This camera system allows parents and grandparents to securely log in and view their baby while in the NICU,” he says. “This is so valuable in so many different circumstances. Many times, the mother has a C-section and is unable to move around after birth as she recovers from a major surgery. It is so nice for her to be able to watch these first several days of her baby’s life in real time.”

In the Nick of Time

Townsend credits Sabrina Brooks and the Health Foundation for their vision, and Brooks can’t say enough about the difference the NicView cameras are making in the NICU.

“Along with strengthening trust and providing reassurance to our NICU families,” Brooks says, “this sophisticated camera system is a valuable clinical tool in neonatal care. These cameras have helped the NICU staff offer

compassionate medical care to the tiniest patients and their families in an innovative way.”

The NicView cameras were installed in May of 2020, and they have become timely, too, as hospital visitor restrictions were adopted due to the COVID-19 health pandemic.

“Not only does it benefit young families who may have other children at home, deployed families and grandparents who are unable to visit due to their health concerns or travel distances, it has become an added resource for connecting families and babies during the pandemic,” Brooks says. “When this project was first mentioned and we raised the monies to make it a reality, we had no idea COVID-19 would make the need for this access for families all the more important. And none of this would be possible without generous donors supporting this project.”



Piedmont Natural Gas/The Duke Energy Foundation is also playing a role in the effort to connect parents with their babies in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The organization has provided \$6,000 toward the purchase of clear face masks for parents to wear so their NICU preemies may see their facial expressions when they visit.

The mask purchase was the brainchild of Kathya Gavazzi, Corporate Director of Women and Children’s Services, who says connecting with their parents visually in an important aspect of a baby’s development.

“We feel so grateful to Piedmont Natural Gas and the Duke Energy Foundation,” she says. “It’s so important that your newborn can see you smile.”

Neither the NicView camera system nor the work of the Cape Fear Valley Health Foundation is lost on Kristen Coggin, M.D., a neonatologist at Cape Fear Valley Neonatology.

“The NicView cameras have proven to be one of the foundation’s greatest gifts to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in my nine years at Cape Fear Valley,” Dr. Coggin says. “Though they are not necessary for the medical management of our babies, they are invaluable tools in allowing us to provide comprehensive care for our babies and their families.

“As a doctor, it gives me great pride to know that our NICU is equipped with the technology we need to truly provide family-centered patient care in a time of crisis for new parents and critically ill infants,” Dr. Coggin says. “As a mother, it gives me great comfort to know that our NicView cameras can keep an infant in plain view of his or her family, even when he or she cannot be held in their arms.”

“Peace of Mind”

It took six weeks before all three of the Lewis triplets were released from the NICU, and Molly Lewis will tell you the NicView cameras were a godsend.

“The babies each had a camera on their isolette,” she says. “We would look in on them each morning, throughout the day, and it was the last thing we did when we went to bed at night. It allowed us peace of mind and allowed us to be connected to them.”

Chip Lewis, 29, also a dentist, kept track of the triplets on his iPhone while in between his dental patients and on his home laptop.

“It’s great for family members,” he says. “The nurses would write messages like, ‘I have finished my bottle’ or ‘Hey Mom and Dad.’ It was nice to feel some kind of connections with them, even though I was at work. Anytime I was done with a patient, I could check on them.”

Both sets of grandparents had access via the NicView cameras, too.

“They loved to be able to look at them and see the message updates,” Molly Lewis says. “It’s almost as if you are sitting there next to them.”