

How OSF leads the way in care for the smallest patients

When faced with one of life's most challenging moments, being admitted into the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), families need the most well-equipped medical team to take care of the littlest of babies.

"It's terrifying," says Jawad Javed, MD, professor of Clinical Pediatrics with University of Illinois College of Medicine-Peoria (UICOMP) and the Division Head/Medical Director of Neonatology with OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois.

Nearly 800 babies are admitted into the NICU at OSF Children's Hospital in Peoria every year. The hospital receives families from the surrounding area, as well as up to more than an hour away.

Many families in these areas live in what's referred to as a health care "desert," especially when it comes to labor and delivery services.

"We are the largest neonatal center between Chicago and St. Louis. It is a critically important piece, because babies that are in Central Illinois, get to stay in Central Illinois. We cover about 30 counties surrounding our hospital facility," Dr. Javed says.

And when it comes to NICU babies, it takes a village to nurture them to full health.

OSF Children's Hospital has 140 specialists who work around the clock taking care of these smallest patients, some weighing barely more than a soda can. This includes staff physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, neonatal dietitians, neonatal pharmacists, respiratory therapists, lactation and feeding consultants, speech and physical therapy specialists, plus case managers who help every step of the way.

Having these resources in place is what has led OSF Children's Hospital to receive Level IV NICU status. Level four is the highest level possible as designated by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

"Essentially, a Level 4 NICU provides full, comprehensive medical and surgical care and services that an infant would need. We provide ECMO (**extracorporeal membrane oxygenation**), we provide cardiac care, cardiac surgery care, general surgical care, neurosurgery, ophthalmology, orthopedics..." Dr. Javed says. "In addition to that, we provide the broad spectrum of pediatric subspecialties."

Additional subspecialties available:

- Home nasogastric (NG) feeding program
- Neonatal simulation and education programs
- Telemedicine support for regional hospitals
- Quality improvement initiatives
- Family-centered development follow-up programs

Dr. Javed says admission into the NICU is one of the most stressful times for families.

"That first hour is so critical for the health, maintenance and success that's going to set up the rest of that child's life," he emphasizes. "Going to a center that has qualified, specialized neonatologists or neonatal care, you know that if things don't go as planned, there is a team that is ready to address those issues head-on and help that child be successful. That's why the NICU is so important."

While Peoria is home to OSF Children's Hospital, OSF Mission Partners are trained, staffed and ready at hospitals across the OSF Ministry to provide the best care possible for parents and babies alike.

"We have neonatologists and nurse practitioners that are positioned in Galesburg, Bloomington and Danville that help implement the oversight of that care," Dr. Javed says. Nurse practitioners across the Ministry also come to OSF Children's Hospital for specialized training, taking what they've learned back to their home hospitals.

OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois is an academic medical center as well. There's a lot of research and quality improvement work that's done, putting OSF on par with big centers around the country. Dr. Javed helped establish the Neonatal Fellowship Program and served as its founding Program Director. The fellowship recently celebrated its third graduating class.

Research is a major component of the academic work. Dr. Javed says OSF is prioritizing things like virtual reality and simulation, creating 4D delivery rooms to help train future physicians. There is also ongoing work in using artificial intelligence tools to help identify infants at risk for complications and support clinical decision-making. There's currently a project looking at predictive models for premature infants who might have early eye condition that can affect vision.

Not only is OSF Children's Hospital the top-ranked NICU center in Central Illinois, it's also one of the most well-recognized institutions across the country.

"This past year, we joined the Children's Hospital Neonatal Consortium. This is a group of nearly 50 centers in the country that have very comprehensive level IV NICUs," Dr. Javed says. Additionally, the NICU at OSF Children's Hospital has been part of the Vermont Oxford Network (VON), a global community of more than 1,400 neonatal centers, since 1992.

Dr. Javed summarized, "Every family that walks through our doors is experiencing one of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. Our mission is to provide the highest level of care close to home, so families can focus on what matters most; helping their baby grow, heal and thrive."

To learn more about the NICU services available across the OSF Ministry, visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#).