

New Neonatal Unit set to open

After more than three years of fundraising and seven months building, the new Neonatal Unit at Middlemore Hospital will open on February the 1st.

The size and technology of the new Unit with its significantly increased Neonatal Intensive and Special Care cots far exceeds the old unit. It is three times larger with a total capacity of 36 cots where Counties Manukau's sickest and smallest babies will be cared for. Babies will mainly be from the Counties Manukau District Health Board (CMDHB) region but the unit will also provide cots at peak demand times for the whole of the Auckland region as well as other regions.

"The old Unit was inadequate for our needs. There was a shortage of neonatal cots, a cramped environment and poor family and visitor facilities," says Nettie Knetsch, GM of Women's Health and Kidz first Hospital; "but that is all changing with the new facility".

The new unit features:

- 36 cots
- A waiting area with play facilities for siblings of babies staying in the unit
- Breast-feeding and expressing rooms
- Dedicated family lounge and parent accommodation
- Parent education room
- A separate area for bereavement care
- Specialised isolation rooms for the management of infectious conditions.

The new unit, which will treat around 600 premature and critically ill newborns annually, will be staffed by a multi-disciplinary team comprising neonatal nurse specialists and neonatal nurses, senior and junior medical staff, as well as allied health and support staff.

The Neonatal Unit is built around the needs of babies and their families. "Families, and in particular parents, play a huge and necessary role in the care delivered to neonates, and facilities within the unit reflect this philosophy," says Knetsch.

One of the most positive changes is that when necessary, parents will have the opportunity to stay at the unit overnight. The additional space will allow parents to have greater opportunity to be with their baby and be supported during this time. "Parents who have a baby who is very sick will naturally want to spend as much time as possible at the cot-side. Allowing parents, mostly mothers, to stay at critical times will help them to be as involved as possible in the care of their sick baby," says Helen McConachy, Charge Nurse Manager of the Neonatal Unit.

The play area for brothers and sisters of babies is also an important feature. "Younger children should not be exposed in an unprepared way to some of what they may experience in an intensive care environment. Preparing children to visit their sick baby will help those children to deal with what is happening in their family life," says Knetsch.

The completion of the new multi-million dollar Neonatal Unit would not have been achieved without funding from many contributors. The South Auckland Health Foundation raised more than \$3.8 million, receiving a number of sizeable contributions from both business and the community. Of particular note is the Lion Foundation who is the principle sponsor of the unit. Ronald McDonald House Charities have sponsored the family wing while Planet Fun has donated toys for the children's play room.

For media enquiries please phone Lauren Young on 09) 378 8433 or 027 243 9900.