Effective Perinatal Intensive Care in Europe: translating knowledge into evidence based practice

Results in Brief

Towards improved perinatal care for very preterm infants

About 1.5 % of total births occur before 32 weeks of gestational age. More comprehensive use of evidence-based care across Europe will ensure the best outcome for these very preterm infants.

Despite significant medical advances in recent decades, infants born very preterm face a high risk of mortality and neurodevelopmental impairment. However, mortality rates vary across geographical regions by more than a factor of two, indicating a disparity in perinatal care.

The scope of the EU-funded EPICE (Effective perinatal intensive care in Europe: Translating knowledge into evidence based practice) project was to improve the survival and development of preterm infants by ensuring that scientific evidence is translated into service provision. For this purpose, the consortium performed studies in 19 regions in 11 countries on 850 000 annual births to evaluate the use and impact of evidence-based interventions for very preterm infants.
Researchers collected demographic and clinical data from over 10 000 very preterm infants with follow-up data on health and development at two years of age. Information regarding policies and practices related to very preterm infants was collected from 134 neonatal units and 123 maternity units.

The consortium discovered an absence of standardised protocols and guidelines for many practices at the national, regional and unit level. In addition, many proven evidence-based practices were underused including delivery in maternity units with specialised on-site neonatal care and interventions known to increase survival, such as use of antenatal corticosteroids and hypothermia prevention. Since the comprehensive use of these practices was associated with lower mortality and morbidity, better guidance to clinicians is expected to improve compliance to best practice.

Project findings were disseminated to regional stakeholders through international conferences and workshops. By communicating strategies and interventions to improve perinatal care, partners envision an overall improvement in the health outcome of this high-risk population. The EPICE network aims to continue to feed evidence-based medical knowledge in different European regions and provide the best healthcare.

Keywords
Perinatal care, preterm infants, neurodevelopmental impairment, neonatal unit

Project Information

**EPICE**
Grant agreement ID: 259882

Project website

**Status**
Closed project

**Start date**
1 January 2011

**End date**
31 December 2015

**Funded under**
FP7-HEALTH

**Overall budget**
€ 3 967 513,79

**EU contribution**
€ 2 999 708

**Coordinated by**
INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA SANTE ET DE LA RECHERCHE MEDICALE
France
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**Last update:** 10 November 2016  
**Record number:** 190526

**Permalink:** https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/190526-towards-improved-perinatal-care-for-very-preterm-infants

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