Quandary

from page IAA

at a baby for 12 hours a day, we can see... Being able to pick up on something soon, that's the key to taking care of babies of this zire," said unit nurse Marie Kuznicki of Clawson.

"It's nowhere near the problem it used to be," said Kelly, adding that it is still a problem with

some patients. Few danger signs

some patients.
Few danger signs
Estimates saide, Kelly stressed
that the onset of premature delivery often ian't predictable, either
for mothers or physicians. And
that certainly applies in cases
where babies are born as early as
23 weeks.
"It's hard to know," Kelly said.
"Usually, you start finding out
about it when the patient calls up
and say "I'm having all off these
contractions." Usually, in prenatal
care, there are not s lot of signs to
tell you you're going to deliver between 23 and 27 weeks.
Often, this kind of premature
labor takes place "in pregnancies
that are going well. Everything's
fine, until the woman starts to
feel contractions are getting
stronger and stronger," Kelly added.
Sometimes, mathers develop

Sometimes, mothers develop serious health problems of their own, such as toxemia, which

prompt emergency Cassarean sections. Other times there is no warning about what might occur.

"We do try to stop the labor and keep the pregnancy going."
Kelly said. "(But) if the baby's right there in the birth canal there's nothing you can do to stop deliver."

delivery."

Signs of premature labor aren't always absent. For example, in some cases, the cervix starts to open up and thin out and/or the uterine wall becomes thinner, he said.

Every day helps
Meanwhile, doing whatever
that can be done to prolong prenancies is crucial to the visibility
of very low-birth-weight Infanta.
Injecting steroids to quicken
lung development, and reduce instances of bleeding in the brain, is
a recent positive development for
perinatal medicine, Kelly said.
Kvery day a fetus stays in the
womb increases chances of survival.

vival.

So, knowing the gestational age is a key piece of information, particularly since 25 weeks is the line drawn in the sand by some doctors about how aggressively to treat micropremies — Michaels among them.

For a 23-week baby without hope of surviving intact, Michaela said he would "not do anything but but keep it warm and com-

but but keep it warm and com-fortable.

"(At) 24 weeks I'd do nothing more. The closer you get to 25 weeks the more careful you have to become, because you've pushed the viability to that point with technology, the more difficult is becomes in not recommending aggressive treatment."

Compounding that dilemms is the uncertainty over gestational age, which means a boby thought to be 25 weeks old might be as young as 22 weeks.

That's why Michaels is uncomfortable chout the notion of "Playing God In The Nursery," the title of a book he pulled off his office shelf.

office shelf.

He said the border of viability has changed since 1980, so much so that doctors today decide to intervene on behalf of a 24- or 25-weeker when those infants "wouldn't have survived 15 years are."

What they look for

Maximum efforts are made, Mi-chaels emphasized, "knowing that — for those who survive — a significant percentage will not

survive intact.
"For the ones who do survive and do well, in a broad sense it can make it all worth it. But just talk to the famillies who have a very seriously handicapped child because of premature birth," Michaela asid.
Kelly estimated that 99 percent

because of premature birth," Michaela said.

Kelly estimated that 99 percent of habies born at 23 weeks or younger do not survive.

"In most cases they just put the baby in a warmer in the NiCU and wait for the baby to die," Kelly said. "If it's a 2*weeker who looked bad they'd do the same. But if it's a 2*weeker who looked bad they'd do the same. But if it's a 2*weeker who looked pood, they would do everything to save that baby."

Neonatologists, those physicians who treat infants immediately after they are born, first examine the general condition of a baby. That entails looking at how fused the eyes are, size of the baby and how well the baby is breathing. "So the (meonatologist) has to put it all together and decide, "is it possible that 1 can give this baby some reasonable existence should the baby survive?" And that's a decision that takes year of experience," not one hastily made, Kelly said.

Although Michaels' personal

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opinion about which bables to ag-gressively treat appears inflatible on the surface, the doctor insists he cheers for the youngest mi-cropreemies to survive intact and bares his point of view on years of experience.

About Messenger

About Messenger
"The sanctity of life is very important to me," Michaels said. "I personally don't have a cause. I have a humanistic approach. I've seen extraordinary successes and I've seen significant difficulties arise. And I've seen families succeed and families fall spart because of this."
Meanwhite, Michaels also asid something good could come out of the public debate sparked over the past year by Michigan dermatologist Gregory Michigan dermatologist Greg

"I think actually, the publicity and the trial, although viewed by some as negative, was actually positive because it provoked discusion about a difficult issue and raised public awareness," Michaels said. "... But when you withdraw life support from a child, it evokes all kinds of emotions. I think that's why it was so negative. I view it as aad., because we can't resolve all potential difficulties of future life for the extremely premature." According to Michaels, the bottom line of the whole debate is "Society has to decide how (it's) going to pay for the care of these children who have difficult problems and support families to

children who have difficult prob-lems and support families to which these children are born. Wo need to be realistic. The negativi-ty here is the act was performed by the parents themselves."

Touch from page 1AA

But Cain and other unit nurses and their job is as rewarding as it is challenging, particularly when they see healthy ex-microprenties abe cared for months after their discharge.

"I'm just so excited and so overwhelmed." Cain said. "To think that this little tuny thing is now a baby. It looks like a baby and reacts like a baby and reacts like a baby and the parents are confident with it. And just to watch the baby reacting to the parents talking and touching. It sjust overwhelming."

Jennifer Andres, another NICU nurse, called it "just amazing how they develop their personalities. When they're there for four or five months, you really know what their personalities are like and you know what their personalities, a Troy resident, added

Andres, a Troy resident, added that, when parents bring their ba-bies back for the preemie reunion picnic, it's hard not to "boast and

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say 'I had a part in that, I helped

care for that baby."
Helping them cope
For those few-and-far-between
moments of reward, NiCU nurses
put in long, grueling hours, always prepared for emergencies
and uncertainty. Those demands
are realities of the game they willingly entered — the medical fight
to save preemies and micropreemies.

"The reason I'm in neonatology
is I'm interested in the challenges
that these babies are constantly

is I'm interested in the challenges that these babies are constantly giving us," Andres emphasized. "They don't give you the cues of-ten that adults do. They can't ver-healy express 'I need this' or 'I need that.' So, you have to learn how to read people's cues and ba-bies' cues. And they can turn very critically on a dime."

ores cues, and they can thin very critically on a dime."

Another thing that can rapidly change is the emotional state of family members. In NICU's, nurses are part psychologists.

For example, Andres said some parents and grandparents might not visit the hospital, not wanting to become emotionally attached to babies they fear will not make

to babies they lear will not make
"They're afraid of loving their
haby, and that's what the nurse is
there to do," Andres said. "To try
and help bridge over that denial
and say Touch your baby, your
baby knows it's you. ". And
you have to do that very gently."
Knowing how to approach families about their babies is another
crucial challenge faced by NICU
nurses, Kurnicki said. "Every
family is so different," she said.
"So you see the coping mechanisms and try to assess them."

Kangaroo care

Kunicki elaborated on that point. "Our goal in the NICU is to... provide support to the fam-ily as well as to the baby, And, as long as one of (the two) isn't

healthy, then we still have chal-lenges. The parents have to be able to cope and to learn and to accept their baby."

A technique known as "kan-garoo care," or akin-to-akin, is making inroads — both at Beau-mont and Providence — as a way to help parenta bond with their micropreemies.

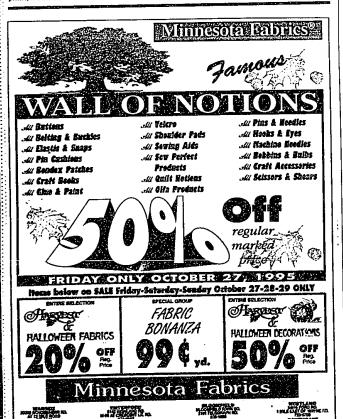
"We do kangaroo care, we en-courage it with mothers and fa-thers," said Linda Omatead, NICU nurse manager at Provi-dence. "The best way to keep the baby warm and encourage bond-ing is skin-to-skin."
Omstead said benefits of kan-

garoo care include improved color and a slower respiratory rate. "It's a comforting measure, not just for the baby, but for the parents,

the baby, but for the parents, too."

Farmington Hills resident Lower Volpe would attest to that. Her 2-yound 13-ounce preemie daughter Andrea. a 26-weeker born in March 1993 at Providence, was the first to benefit from the technique at that hospital. Andrea today is a bubbly 2-year-oid.
"I feel it was really, really important to do it," Lora Volpe said. "I'm her mother. I wanted to hold her so bad and do some bonding with her.... It was just a wonderful feeling to hold her."

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