

A nonprofit works to advance pediatric emergency care

R Baby Foundation strives to ensure that every pediatric resident is properly trained.

By Olga Deshchenko

Rebbecca Ava Rabinowitz was born four weeks premature on July 13, 2006 and released less than a week later. But in the days that followed, the infant repeatedly returned to the hospital.

Rebecca's parents noticed she was lethargic, congested with thick mucus and had difficulty breathing. But every time the family brought their baby to the emergency room or a pediatrician, they were told they were overreacting.

"The doctors basically told us that our baby had a common cold and we knew that she was sicker," says her mother, Phyllis Rabinowitz. "You just know when your baby is sick."

Just nine days after she was born, Rebecca passed away. Her parents later found out she had contracted a common enteroviral infection. If the diagnosis had been made earlier, Rebecca might still be alive.

After losing their daughter, Phyllis and Andrew Rabinowitz founded the R Baby Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to saving infants by improving pediatric emergency care nationwide.

The founders learned pediatric ER medicine is a tiny piece of the federal funding pie when compared to adult medicine. "When we spoke to the medical community, it was amazing that they just completely agreed," says Rabinowitz. "They used the phrase 'subpar' to describe pediatric ER care."

Since its inception in 2006, R Baby has raised more than \$4.5 million and allotted more than 90 percent of the funds towards grants for advancing pediatric ER care.

Fundraising for babies

R Baby offers a wealth of resources on its website for parents looking to get informed about pediatric ER care, but the primary function of the organization is fundraising for infant health care.

"We raise money and give it directly to hospitals that create programs that not only benefit their hospital but will also benefit the greater nation," says Rabinowitz.

The grantees are hospitals around the country that work to advance infant care through neonatal and ER training programs, accurate and speedy detection of newborn illnesses and virus infections, and effective communication between the family and the clinical team.

For instance, the Maria Fareri Children's Hospital at Westchester Medical used a grant to ensure that ERs in the Hudson Valley were properly equipped and staffed to handle pediatric patients. Employing its expertise, the facility developed an Emergency Department Certification Program to certify hospitals that demonstrate their preparedness for handling pediatric ER patients.

And through another grant, Mount Sinai was able to establish an R Baby Pediatric Emergency Medicine Fellowship, which supports a pediatric ER specialist focused on infectious diseases.

In 2007, the University of Maryland Hospital for Children at the University of Maryland Medical Center partnered with R Baby to establish the Rebecca Ava Rabinowitz Molecular Diagnostic Laboratory, a facility dedicated to developing diagnostic tests for infectious diseases that affect babies and children.

R Baby is also adamant about disseminating the results and innovative solutions developed by its grantees. It operates MedExchange, a website that acts as a resource for the pediatric medical community and the public - visitors can search R Baby grant programs and their findings.

POISE Network

One of the nonprofit's most prominent national efforts is the POISE (Patient Outcomes in Simulation Education) Network.

Founded by two doctors who served as pediatric emergency medicine fellows supported by an R Baby grant in 2008, the POISE Network consists of educational programs and research projects.

Pediatric residents who take part in POISE's educational offerings practice crucial medical procedures, such as infant lumbar punctures and neonatal intubations, on baby mannequin high-fidelity simulators.

"The idea is that you shouldn't be practicing on patients," says Rabinowitz. "Anyone who touches a baby should have experience and do it right the first time because it's so critical in those emergency minutes."

Simulation training has been used in areas of adult medicine for years, but there's little evidence to show how well it improves outcomes in pediatric care. This is where POISE's research component comes into play. At the end of 2010, the network produced more than 20 abstracts and presentations, which appeared on the agendas of national scientific and medical conferences.

POISE is currently training 20 percent of the nation's pediatric interns and R Baby hopes to make it 100 percent in the near future. "We're trying to get the training to be mandatory," says Rabinowitz. "It's gotten a lot of traction in the medical community."

For the past two years, R Baby has held a Mother's Day Run/Walk in New York City's Central Park, raising more than \$1 million for the POISE Network.

More than 40 hospitals are currently taking part in POISE initiatives and the network is looking to add more members.

"One thing I've learned from R Baby is that if we - parents and medical practitioners - collaborate more, we can save more lives," Rabinowitz says.

● **Online:** dotmed.com/dm15914

Olga Deshchenko can be reached via email at olga@dotmed.com