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Brainchild of Wesley employees leads to business that helps premature babies

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Adam Knapp

A safety concern identified by the staff at Wesley Medical Center in 2001 has led to the creation of a system to avoid complications and even deaths in premature infants.

Nancy McMaster, director of supply chain operations at Wesley, says the SafeChild System evolved from discussions about the chances of a nurse accidentally hooking up a syringe full of formula or breast milk to the IV tube instead of the feeding tube.

"I mean, the tubing was just alike," McMaster says. "Same color, same size. It made it too easy for a human to make an error. And there had been incidents where (premature babies) had been killed by that error (in some cases nationally)."

So McMaster and Wesley's neonatal staff helped develop a system with a fix called a forcing function -- two incompatible, parallel systems.

McMaster says she was unsuccessful in getting the device made by a large manufacturer. "The major vendors weren't interested because the market was so small," she says.

She presented the idea to Clay Kennard, who manufactures IV tubing at a small distributorship called CritiCare in Oklahoma City. Kennard invested nearly \$200,000 to start NeoChild, which makes the SafeChild System.

Growth Mode

Kennard added three employees to NeoChild last year -- two warehouse managers and an administrator in addition to six direct sales reps and five distributors ranging from four to seven reps -- and expects the business to grow.

"It's been a challenge," Kennard says. "I'm spending all my time trying to keep manufacturing this. I've had three major, Fortune 500 companies contact me exhibiting what I would call a certain degree of interest."

It costs a hospital \$11.50 to implement each SafeChild system, Kennard says. Sales are predominately handled through regional medical distributors. He has distribution companies in Oklahoma City, Baltimore, Atlanta, Philadelphia and Chicago.

Neonatologist Curtis Dorn, chair of the pharmacy and therapeutics committee at Wesley, compared it to the automobile and petroleum industries changing the nozzles on diesel pumps and the fuel tank inlets on cars.

"No matter how tired, bored, uneducated or distracted, a person cannot make the diesel to unleaded tank mistake," Dorn says. "... The potential market for a safe enteral tubing and delivery system is large."

NeoChild started business in Jan. 2007. Today, Kennard estimates he has 50 to 75 customers -- mostly in California, Florida, Texas and Georgia -- buying the SafeChild system and its parts. Wesley is the only Wichita client, Kennard says.

"It helps you feel more confident that there won't be some inadvertent mistake," says Cindy Harmon, nurse manager for neonatal special nurseries at Wesley. "We've always had various pieces of parts of this system ... but there still wasn't anything to stop that (feeding) tubing from being plugged into an IV line. The potential for harm was so great."

SafeChild System

Manufacturer: NeoChild.
Web site: www.neochild.com.
Location: Oklahoma City.
President: Clay Kennard.
Phone: (888) 887-6428.



The SafeChild System eliminates the possibility of accidentally confusing the feeding and IV tubes.