



## Summary Report - Emily Hills

Emily Hills was awarded an International Travel Scholarship in 2018 by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists to complete a short neonatal study tour of the United States. The tour included visiting two neonatal units in New York City and attending the 8<sup>th</sup> National Association of Neonatal Therapist (NANT) conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, to present a poster with Dr Deanna Gibbs on Early Intervention – Sensory, Motor, Attachment, Regulation, Therapy (EI-SMART). The purpose of the study tour was to begin to understand how to raise the occupational therapy (OT) profile in the United Kingdom so that eventually every unit has a neonatal occupational therapist as a core member of their team.

Occupational Therapy is a respected and well-recognised profession in the United States of America. Occupational Therapy is well established within the neonatal field. Neonatal occupational therapists are able to bring a myriad of skills to the table particularly their mental health knowledge. This enables them to both support families in this vulnerable and frightening time and also incorporate their knowledge of development and environmental influence of occupational performance to support the developing neonate.

The tour began in New York shadowing Dana Fern, a neonatal occupational therapist with over 20 years' experience, who is employed full time at Lennox Hills, in a small, private, level three neonatal intensive care unit on the upper east side. Dana has worked at this hospital for over 15 years and leads on developmental care, feeding, motor, and sensory and relationship based care. The unit was compact and did not have the same quantity of family facilities that many units have in London. However the value and recognition that is placed on the role of occupational therapy within this field is inspirational.

Emily's tour also included a visit to Bellevue Hospital, a state run hospital, which has recently been refurbished and is now described as a state of the art neonatal intensive care unit that has been specifically designed to mimic the nurturing environment of the mother's womb. This unit was extremely spacious and only cared for 20 infants. There was a strong family-centred care focus with the launch pad designed to help parents become familiar with their infants' habits, behaviour, sleep patterns and routines. The unit also employed a full-time occupational therapist. This therapist was also required to cover all acute services in the hospital. Her day included supporting a family transition a baby for skin-to-skin to helping an elderly patient with independent transfers.

Finally the tour concluded with the NANT 8th conference. This conference is the highlight of any neonatal therapists' year and incorporates both a pre-conference and main conference. There were many highlights including: networking with colleagues and friends, learning about new neonatal resources, hearing the latest evidence based practice. The conference also provides a nurturing environment, where you have a moment to reflect and reignite passion for neonatal occupational therapy.