

Vascular Access Certification

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Infusion therapy is the most frequently applied type of therapy at pediatric and neonatal intensive care units. As we all know, severely ill children and young neonates often cannot be orally fed. For this reason vascular access has to be obtained to administer medication, fluids and nutrition. Regrettably, vascular access gives rise to a wide range of complications.

An important task for nurses is to obtain and maintain vascular access, which requires practical and theoretical knowledge. Lack of knowledge was one of the problems we encountered in our neonatal setting. In the Netherlands there is no nursing specialty to provide us with evidence-based and up-to-date information unlike the US where dedicated IV nurse specialists provide a high standard of vascular care. This is not only a Dutch problem however; nurses in most European countries are in the same situation.

In the United States the Infusion Nurses Society (INS) and the Association for Vascular Access (AVA) are dedicated to vascular access. They support healthcare workers with continuing vascular access education and research and certify them to provide optimal infusion care and vascular access. There are two certification programs: Certified Registered Nurse Infusion (by INS) and Vascular Access Certification (by AVA).

We contacted both organizations, and both invited us to take the exams and get certified. For organizational reasons we choose to attend the educational program offered by the AVA. So last October we flew to the US and participated in the Vascular Access Certification program.

We learned for example everything about the basics of blood vessels, types of vascular access devices, the various venous routes like peripheral, midline and central, causes of vascular access related complications, and biomedical devices for vascular visualization.

Afterwards we were also able to attend the conference organized by the AVA in San Jose, California. Fortunately we met many other nurses at the conference that were also searching for answers and trying to improve vascular access for their settings.

We are grateful to the ESPNIC, which generously offered us the opportunity to participate in the Vascular Access Certification program. In the near future we hope to set up the nurse specialty locally and introduce it into the European setting. Maybe ESPNIC can be a platform to realize educational programs for specialties such as vascular access.