

### Effect of Delayed Contact on Neonatal Behavior

Dr. G. Gathwala and Dr. I. Narayanan's report on *Effect of delayed contact on neonatal behavior*, implies that temporary separation of a neonate ( $2.8 \pm 1.0$  days) from his mother would affect his behavior which could be observed even at the end of 4 weeks(1). Their data on interactive processes, motor and organizational processes on initial assessment shows a significant difference in behavior between the two groups of babies. Does this mean a lack of maternal involvement for 24-48 hrs has already affected the behavior? Is the neonate able to differentiate between the mother figure and residential elder women and alter its behavior right from day 2?

A curve of recovery, plotted through several assessments in first month, would be a better method of characterising neonatal behavior.

In our study on small for gestational age (SGA) babies, we have reported that they perform better than (AGA) babies on orientation cluster(2). We have also commented that this superior performance may be due to more frequent handling of these small infants by the mother. Analysis of data on those babies managed in our nursery with the mother coming intermittently for breast feeds does not show any difference in their behavior and that of SGA babies nursed by the mother on her bed.

The data provided in the article does not adequately prove that lack of maternal

contact for a short period of time has an effect on neonatal behavior. It would have been appropriate to have the two groups of neonates with similar pattern of behavior at initial assessment.

R.S. Iyer,  
Department of Pediatrics,  
Kasturba Medical College and Hospital,  
Manipal 576 119,  
Karnataka.

### REFERENCES

1. Gathwala G, Narayanan I. Cesarean section and delayed contact: Effect on baby's behavior. *Indian Pediatr* 1990, 27: 1295-1299.
2. Iyer RS, Chetan R, Venkatesh A. Neonatal behavior of small for gestational age infants. *Indian Pediatr* 1989, 26: 987-991.

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### Reply

We appreciate the interest of Dr. Iyer in our article. The significant differences at the initial assessment for interactive behavior and motor activity between the 2 groups would obviously imply that 24-48 hours' separation immediately after birth affects these aspects of a baby's behavior. Separation, involved the cesarean section (CS) babies' stay in the nursery. Feeding, cleaning and changing, here was done according to a time schedule and offered very little human interaction. This, possibly, also contributed to the observed differences in behavior.

The query regarding the neonate being able to differentiate between the mother