

# Nicoteh

## A (Christmas) Story



On September 7, 2018, Nicoteh is born with an estimated gestational age of 30 weeks and a birth weight of 1150 g at Rundu State Hospital. She is the first child of her 19-year-old mother.

In the neonatology ward of the hospital (Prem Unit), she is successfully stabilized with a Pumani bubble CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) device.

**Fig. 1.** Sabine Berger, a pediatric nurse, takes care of little Nicoteh; she is closely observed by the infant's mother.



The mother of Nicoteh takes very good care of her daughter. Around the clock, she expresses her breast milk and feeds her daughter through a thin feeding tube.

She sleeps in a room right next to the Prem Unit, together with other mothers whose babies are also hospitalized.

**Fig. 2.** The mothers of the Prem Unit babies sometimes have to live for weeks together in a very crowded room.



On day of life 5, the Nicoteh's condition changes: she no longer digests her feedings and repetitively has to vomit.

Further investigations suggest that she might have an abdominal infection.

Antibiotics are started without delay and feedings via naso-gastric tube are stopped. Unfortunately, there is no rapid recovery. Given the limited options in Rundu, transfer to Windhoek has to be considered.

**Fig. 3.** Deeply worried, the mother observes the preparations for transport to Windhoek General



After discussing the case with Dr. Wim de Mey from the Windhoek Central Hospital, transfer to this referral center is organized. At this point, it is not clear whether the little girl will survive the 750 km ambulance drive.

**Fig. 4.** An incubator with Nicoteh is loaded into an ambulance; her mother accompanies the transport to Windhoek.



After returning from Rundu, we get a chance to visit the Windhoek Central Hospital: we are very happy to meet Nicotéh and her mother again.

A CT exam of her abdomen had not revealed any new insights, and she is still being treated with broad-spectrum antibiotics.

**Fig. 5.** Nicotéh is nursed in an incubator at Windhoek Central Hospital: she still requires some oxygen and antibiotics.



Enteral nutrition could be increased only very slowly, and Nicotéh has hardly gained any weight. At the time of our visit, she is finally on full enteral feeds.

Contrary to our fears, Nicotéh has managed to stay alive. However, when we leave for Switzerland, it is still uncertain what the future might bring for her.

**Fig. 6.** Last opportunity for Prof. Thomas M. Berger to examine the small premature infant and to discuss the next steps with Dr. Wim de Mey before returning to Switzerland.



The little patient has to stay for a total of five weeks in the hospital in Windhoek. On November 23, while still on antibiotics, she is transferred back to Rundu State Hospital together with her mother.

**Fig. 7.** Nicotéh shortly before being brought back to Rundu by ambulance.



Finally, on November 30, 2019, after more than 12 weeks in the hospital, Nicotéh can be discharged home with a body weight of 2000 g (850 g above her birth weight).

Despite our concerns, this Christmas story has a happy end. The sponsors of NEO FOR NAMIBIA – Helping Babies Survive played an important role in this story.

Nicotéh, her mother, doctors and nurses are deeply grateful for the help that was made possible through your donations!

**Fig. 8.** The last days in the hospital: Nicotéh's mother holds her daughter in close skin contact (Kangaroo Care) and thus contributes to her recovery.