Role of Physical Therapist in Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

The Physical Therapist (PT) plays an integral role in the life of the newborn infant who has spina bifida. The PT closely evaluates the neonate and part of that assessment includes determining what muscle groups are actively working in the infants lower extremities as well as available range of motion and neonatal reflexes. Tolerance to handling and touch are also assessed as well as how the baby tolerates being in several positions. PT also works closely with orthopedics regarding recommendations for casting vs stretching exercises, which is specific to each baby.

Parental education is imperative at this stage--- the PT will teach the parents the following:

1. How to safely complete passive range of motion to the infants lower extremities
2. How to look for active muscle contractions
3. How to safely position your baby and transition from lying on their back to their side to their stomach
4. How to safely pick up your baby and various positions to hold your baby while ensuring that there isn't increased pressure over your babies back if they had surgery to close their meningocele.
5. Developmental activities that are age appropriate--- also selection of developmental activities to facilitate the growth of the babies gross motor skills.
6. Recommendation and discussion of what to expect from physical therapists in the community through Early Intervention as well as in our Spina Bifida clinic. The PT in our NICU was the primary PT in our Spina Bifida clinic for ~10 years.