

Erika Clemens
Occupational Therapist 3
UC San Diego Health: Rehabilitation Services

To the Committee,

It is with great pleasure that the rehabilitation services department would like to recommend Erika Clemens, neonatal intensive care unit occupational therapist, for 2018-2019 Exemplary Staff Employee of the Year. Erika came to our department in May 2013 and has consistently and expertly served our smallest patients and their families. She has proven to be an asset to our department and the NICU.

After graduating from Washington University in St. Louis, Erika began her OT career as an adult therapist in North Dakota and Illinois where she worked in various settings and populations including inpatient and outpatient, as well as home health and pediatrics. It was in North Dakota where she was initially trained on NICU practice. Erika ultimately moved to California where she became a paneled therapist with California Children's Services and obtained a number of certifications focused on infant care including Lactation Educator Counselor and Swallowing Assessment, Evaluation, or Intervention. Currently, Erika is co-chair of Developmental Care and Neonatal Integrative Care committees. Since joining our organization, Erika has brought UCSD Health onto the national stage with her expertise and remarkable contributions to neonatal care.

Over the past three years, Erika dedicated time to creating and implementing innovative programs to benefit our patients and the San Diego community. In 2016, in a collaborative effort between the Development Care Committee and the Cuddler Volunteer Program, Erika launched Wee Reads, a shared reading program that has been shown to increase bonding, decrease parental stress, and positively impact developmental growth for years. This program was awarded Best Practice by The Joint Commission in 2018 and is now included in The Joint Commission's Best Practice library. Building on the success of Wee Reads program, Erika implemented the Wee Feeds program in 2018, which looks to the infant's behavior to determine readiness to eat, rather than using a generic formula. She also developed HydroTherapy as a treatment technique with guidance from an outside NICU. This year, 2019, Erika hopes to introduce Music Therapy Program to the NICU. She has been diligent at writing grants and vetting music therapists in order to complete and present this program.

Erika's accomplishments are numerous despite her many competing priorities. She showcases these extraordinary outcomes at regional and national conferences, presenting posters, and leading seminars. She shares her clinical expertise with the greater worldwide community on volunteer trips to Mexico and Zambia, with an anticipated trip to Haiti later this year. Within UCSD Health's NICU, Erika is building relationships by offering unique shadowing opportunities to other rehab professionals, nurses, and physicians.

Erika plays a vital role across the continuum of neonatal care at UCSD Health and is a leading contributor to NICU's body of knowledge. She is an excellent patient advocate and a devoted steward to our patients. Erika embodies UCSD Health's mission of delivering outstanding care across our community.

I highly recommend Erika for the Exemplary Staff Employee of the Year award. Thank you for your consideration.