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## Making Room To Grieve, To Comfort

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August 1 2006

Gary Doyens will never forget the day nine years ago when nurses drew a blue curtain around Caroline's bassinet, and he and his wife cradled their dying baby for the first and last time.

"We felt rushed," said Doyens. "Not that we wanted our daughter to hurry up and die. I didn't want to let go."

But he hurried.

All he could think about was the parents outside the curtain. The parents praying over similarly tiny babies in similar bassinets. The parents he knew must be thinking his baby had just died, could theirs be next?

Caroline was born early and desperately sick on March 26, 1997. She struggled for two months. But on May 27, doctors at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital told Doyens and his wife, Jocelyn Maminta, that no more could be done. It was time to remove the baby from the machines that kept her alive.

After saying good-bye, Doyens and Maminta opened the curtain and walked out through the dormitory-style neonatal intensive care unit, past the other families who for so long had been Caroline's neighbors.

"I felt like all eyes were on me," Doyens said. "I felt like [saying] I'm so sorry my daughter died here today."

Losing Caroline was terribly painful. But the lack of privacy that dogged the family throughout her hospital stay was traumatic, Doyens said.

"One day, I needed to be alone," he recalled. "I went to the public waiting room, and there were kids eating candy; the TV was blaring; the phones were ringing."

When they were ready to turn their grief into action, Doyens and Maminta came up with the idea for Caroline's Room - a quiet place within the neonatal intensive care unit where families can go for reflection, rest or serious conversation.

The couple raised money to build the first rooms, which cost about \$25,000 each, by hosting charity fashion shows. A Caroline's Room at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford was mostly paid for with donations from Lego Corp., New Alliance Bank and the Angel Fund in New Haven.

Doyens and Maminta dedicated the first Caroline's Room at Yale-New Haven Children's Hospital in 1998. They have since created three others in Texas, where Maminta, a television news anchor, and Doyens, a business executive, lived briefly after their daughter's death. There, they had another daughter, Campbell, now 5. Their oldest child, a son, Jordan, is 12.

Now back in Connecticut, where Maminta is a news anchor at Channel 8 in New Haven, the couple recently dedicated the newest Caroline's Room at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center, or CCMC. While the room will allow private good-byes, it will also provide a place for discussions about babies who may face surgery or a lifetime of challenges, said Dr. Victor Herson, medical director of the NICU at CCMC. "For every one death, we have 10 serious conversations, maybe about a baby with a poor long-term prognosis."

The cozy room with subdued dark-blue walls is set up like a living room. On one wall are plugs that allow parents

to wheel in the bassinette and spend quiet time with a baby without removing life-sustaining equipment.

Doyens said anybody who has had a premature baby knows the time in the neonatal intensive care unit can be a harrowing roller coaster ride.

"Caroline's Room makes that ride a little less bumpy," he said.

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