

APGAR

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The newborn baby was silent as he was lifted through the air. His silence blotted out the background commotion of the nurses and doctors moving into action, the incessant beeps of warning alarms, and the tremulous voices of his grandparents trying to make sense of the past few minutes. My ears strained to hear the characteristic gasp and cry of a newborn baby, reluctantly pulled from its warm cocoon and into the harsh lights of a hospital room. Over the past few days, I witnessed this one simple noise warm a room. It spread smiles across the faces of new mothers, grandparents, and big sisters. It allowed the huddled NICU team to breathe a collective sigh of relief. Yet, the seconds ticked by and I heard no such noise.

Unlike most babies, wriggling against the grasp of the awaiting nurse with tiny fists clenched in fury, this baby offered no resistance. His limbs hung with a weight far greater than the 9 lb 15 oz of his chubby body, and his face remained limp and expressionless. He stayed silent and motionless despite the aggressive stimulation he received. Suction tubes forced into his mouth elicited no response, and he stoically withstood an onslaught of forceful back patting and vigorous rubbing. Finally, a gurgle escaped from the baby's lungs, followed by a shaky cry. I became keenly aware of my heart rate slowing and the tension leaving my shoulders as my focus expanded beyond this newborn survivor.

Two doctors were bent over the foot of the mother's bed, deciding the best approach for laceration repair and bleeding control. A third, her scrubs now more crimson than teal, walked out the door. Feet away, two new grandparents, dressed in matching hot pink tees establishing their roles as "pawpaw" and "meemaw," beamed at their daughter with watery eyes. Across the room, a nurse asked permission to leave and compose herself. I stood amid the commotion, as a student, inevitably in the way but desperately wishing to be useful.

Medical jargon would later be attached to what I witnessed: APGAR score of 2, shoulder dystocia, prolonged decelerations on fetal heart rate tracing. In the meantime, little was said. After leaving the room, the residents returned unceremoniously to their notes; meanwhile, I sat scrolling through an *UpToDate* article on shoulder dystocia, the image of a limp baby burnt into my vision.

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