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American researchers receive prestigious award in Germany

Groundbreaking research in prenatal attachment called “crucial”

Three internationally respected American researchers and clinicians received the prestigious Arnold Lucius Gesell Prize this month in Munich at an international symposium on parent-infant bonding and attachment.

The Theodor Hellbrugge Foundation honored professors John Kennell of Cleveland and Marshall Klaus of Berkeley, and psychotherapist Phyllis Klaus of Berkeley with the 2005 Gesell Prize for “their significant and outstanding lifetime accomplishments” in fostering early parent-infant development. The recognition included the award of 10,000 euros, given at a ceremony at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitat.

The Arnold Lucius Gesell Prize is awarded annually to researchers in child development who have made significant contributions to the field. The Theodor Hellbrugge Foundation created the award in 1996 in memory of its namesake, the great pediatrician and psychologist, who founded the Yale Clinic of Child Development at Yale University.

Professors Kennell and Klaus and psychotherapist Klaus have conducted groundbreaking research on mother-infant bonding and the importance of continuous labor support for women during childbirth. Their research led them to become three of the founders of Doulas of North America, now known as DONA International, the world’s oldest and largest professional doula association. Doulas offer skilled labor support to birthing women.

Their research, conducted in large, randomized control trials, demonstrates the remarkable effects of emotional and social support for the mother by a doula on decreasing the complications of labor, changing the psychology of the mother and improving her behavior with her infant. They found doulas decreased the length of labor by 25 percent, almost halved the rate of cesarean births, and have resulted in improved maternal mental health and, consequently, improved infant care by the mother.

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Largely due to their research on mother-infant bonding, many hospitals worldwide now offer 24-hour visitation to prematurely born or ill babies and early contact. Likewise, “24-hour rooming in” has become the hospital standard for healthy babies and has proven to be invaluable for breastfeeding mothers.

Kennell, Klaus and Klaus’ research was part of the basis of UNICEF’s 1991 Baby Friendly Initiative, which has been adopted in many parts of the world, including 3,800 hospitals in China, 1,400 in Thailand and 1,200 in the Philippines.

Their additional research on the care of mothers whose infants had died has helped increase appreciation for the grieving process to ultimately enhance the bonding of such women and their future children.

Marshall Klaus, MD, is an internationally known pediatrician and neonatologist. He is a professor emeritus of pediatrics at the University of California – San Francisco. John H. Kennell, MD is a distinguished pediatrician and professor emeritus of pediatrics at Case Western Reserve Medical School and a pioneer in perinatal care. Phyllis H. Klaus, C.S.W., M.F.C.C., teaches and practices psychotherapy with an emphasis on the psychology of pregnancy.

Klaus is the co-editor of *Care of the High-Risk Infants*, a mainstay in the intensive care nursery. Klaus and Klaus are co-authors of *Your Amazing Newborn*, and together with Kennell of *The Doula Book, Mothering the Mother and Bonding*.