

□ *Editor's note: This is one of several upcoming stories that will focus on bills introduced in the 2013 Nebraska Legislature and how they affect Imperial area residents.*

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

If passed, a bill establishing the Newborn Critical Congenital Heart Disease Screening Act would require all birthing facilities in Nebraska to conduct critical congenital heart disease screening on newborns and report the results to the newborn's physician.

Chase County Community Hospital (CCCH) could begin the screenings immediately, or as soon as the Legislature passes LB 225. That's according to Nursing Director Annette Kasselmann.

The bill acknowledges the fact that critical congenital heart disease is the leading cause of death for infants born with a birth defect, and is also among the most common birth defects.

Kasselmann said 75 out of 1,000 newborns have some kind of congenital heart deformity. "It may not seem like a lot but it is a lot," she stated.

According to LB 225, critical congenital heart disease screening means a testing procedure or procedures intended to detect hypoplastic left heart syndrome, pulmonary atresia, tetralogy of Fallot, total anomalous pulmonary venous return, transposition of the great arteries, tricuspid atresia and truncus arteriosus.

"We could start that today if we wanted," Kasselmann said. The testing would be done by Pulseoximetry, which measures the oxygenation of the circulation in the limbs.

Pulseoximetry is currently used at CCCH on adults in surgery. A little clamp is attached to the finger during a procedure.

On a newborn, Kasselmann said, it would be used at specific times just after birth and again at 24 hours of age. The clamp would be attached to the foot and hand of the newborn.

"There are parameters that indicate if there are problems," she noted. "If they're not normal we'd send the baby to a cardiologist in a bigger hospital."

That way the cardiac problem can possibly be taken care of immediately and there will be less of a problem in the future, Kasselmann commented.

Since CCCH already has the equipment to test newborns for heart disease, Kasselmann said the only expense to the hospital would be a little staff education. "It shouldn't be difficult at all to implement," she said of LB 225 if passed.

Kasselmann has already obtained training material in the event LB 225 is approved during the current legislative session.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Jim Smith of Papillion, cleared a first-round vote last Friday in the Legislature.