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New bouncing baby, er, robot arrives

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By Andrea Woodhouse Staff Writer

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Photo Gallery

One of Torrance Memorial Medical Center's most recent arrivals weighs a little more than 7 pounds, measures 21 inches long, and cries, whimpers and wails with the best of them.

But this baby - named Simantha - is packed with wires and a computer, and cost \$35,000 to deliver.

The bouncing baby, er, robot is the latest addition to the facility's Clinical Skills Laboratory, a mock medical environment where hospital staffers practice techniques and skills on computer-driven mannequins.

"This kind of completes the package," said John Edwards, the center's simulation technology specialist and proud papa of sorts.

The hospital celebrated Simantha's arrival Thursday with - what else - a baby shower that brought streams of staffers and volunteers to coo.

And baby makes five at the laboratory, where four other life-like mock patients reside, awaiting to test the knowledge, critical thinking and patient care skills of hospital staff.

With a click of a computer mouse, Edwards made the robot tot - clad in a pink top and matching knit cap - cry, hiccup, seize and even stop breathing.

Upon seeing Simantha's chubby little cheeks turn an icy blue, Monika Chudoba, a labor and delivery nurse, jumped right in and began resuscitating it.

"Oh, she's turning pink now," said Chudoba, holding a mask over the baby's mouth and pumping air into her mechanical lungs. "Yay!"

On staff at the hospital for three years, Chudoba said she instinctively wanted to help the suffering infant, robotic or not.

And that's exactly the point, Edwards said.

Simantha and her family members allow hospital staffers like Chudoba an opportunity to practice skills in a realistic setting, without fear of risking injury to a human patient.

"We're very happy to have her," Chudoba said. "You can actually see the difference what you're doing makes."

And five is apparently not enough at the laboratory: Edwards said someday soon he'd like to add a robotic pediatric patient and a birthing simulator.

Longtime hospital volunteer Dorothy Lisman was among the guests at Simantha's shower, which included punch, pastel-colored decorations, traditional shower games, and mounds of gifts set for donation to Casa de

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los Angelitos, a Harbor City facility that provides housing and guidance to unwed pregnant women.

Like any other excited extended family member of a new baby, she arrived at the hospital anxious to learn if the infant was a boy or a girl.

Call her traditional, but the Harbor City resident who cuddles babies at the hospital's neonatal intensive-care unit needed to know what color blanket to knit for the baby.

"I'm going to make a pink blanket over the weekend," she said.

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