

Update on Infant Feeding in Emergencies

Background

The "Core Group"¹, composed of UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, ENN² and IBFAN have developed and disseminated Module 1³ on Infant Feeding in Emergencies (IFE). Since April 2001, over 1000 sets of Module 1 training material have been disseminated to agencies and institutions.



Kent Page, UNICEF, DRC, 2003

Module 2, now at production stage, aims to provide health and nutrition personnel with up to date technical knowledge on appropriate infant feeding and equip workers with the knowledge and skills to positively affect practice. The final editorial process, and production and distribution, is being funded by UNICEF, IBFAN-GIFA and ENN.

Progress over the last year

To strengthen the evidence base of the modules, a project was developed during 2003 between Geneva Infant Feeding Association (GIFA) and the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN)⁴. ENN undertook to evaluate the application of Module 1 to date, and to collate field experiences, in the form of cases studies, of agencies involved in infant and young child feeding in emergencies. Key challenges facing field workers were reported at SCN 2003 in Chennai, and included:

- the management of artificial feeding in emergencies
- the management of malnourished infants under six months
- complementary feeding (CF)

To address these issues, further work was done on the Module 2 draft, to:

a) Significantly develop the section on artificial feeding in emergencies.

This now touches on interventions at population and individual level, and institutional feeding of unaccompanied infants.

b) Produce a new chapter on managing severely malnourished infants under six months of age.

An approach that offered practical options for the feeding (and care) of these infants was adopted. The approach should, to the greatest extent possible, help ensure that breastfeeding (and the child's future food security) is protected during rehabilitation. The core group decided that the guidance should acknowledge the current protocols in use and where they differ, in the process drawing attention to the gaps in definitive research and hopefully helping to move the field forward.

¹A group of agency personnel committed to taking forward the process of improving practice in infant feeding in emergencies through the development and dissemination of appropriate training materials

²USAID support of ENN IFE activities is gratefully acknowledged

³Infant Feeding in Emergencies, Module 1 for emergency relief staff. Draft material developed through collaboration of: WHO, UNICEF, LINKAGES, IBFAN, ENN and additional contributors. March 2001

⁴See online report on <http://www.ennonline.net>, ENN/GIFA Report

This chapter has now been circulated to a broad cross-section of external reviewers for comments to ascertain, is it:

- Safe?
- Practical/realistic?
- Is there crucial information missing?
- Does it appropriately acknowledge differences in current guidance?
- Identify gaps in research?
- Provide a rationale and suggest priorities for the recommended actions?

Feedback should be collated and necessary changes made to the chapter by the beginning of April 2004.

c) Significant revision of the section on complementary feeding in emergencies

The additional part on complementary feeding has been revised and largely refers to the WHO guiding principles for complementary feeding the breastfed child⁵, WHO guiding principles for feeding infants and young children during emergencies⁶, and recent WHO publications on HIV/AIDS and infant feeding^{7,8}. The core group have decided that dealing with all the issues around complementary feeding in emergencies is essential, but including in-depth training material is beyond the scope of module 2 training material. Given this, and the work that is currently underway in different groups looking at complementary feeding, e.g. WHO technical consultation on CF in the non-breastfed child, the core group hope to address this comprehensively in a third module.

Immediate targets

Production and dissemination of module 2, available online, some print versions and on CD-rom.

Module 2 will be available through ENN. Anyone who wishes to register interest in receiving the module should email: marie@ennonline.net

Outstanding issues and future activities

Ongoing evaluation

For both Module 1 and Module 2, ENN will undertake ongoing targeting and evaluation of material distribution and use. Module 2 will be managed as a working document, and will be periodically reviewed. This has have been invaluable in the module development to date, and is necessary to sustain the development of a practical and comprehensive training module.

Collaboration and networking

Also, though much of what is advised in the training modules is proven best practice and collated from a wide range of evidenced based research, there is also guidance on areas where there has been little research undertaken. Managing malnourished infants under six months of age is one area that has been particularly highlighted to the core group. Addressing these issues is essential to informing and developing the training modules, but goes beyond the scope of the core group alone.

Module 3

Develop plans and identify funding for a Module 3 on complementary feeding in emergencies.

⁵Guiding principles for complementary feeding the breastfed child, PAHO, WHO

⁶Guiding principles for feeding infants and young children during emergencies. Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, WHO 2003. Draft

⁷HIV and infant feeding: Guidelines for Decision-Makers, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UNFPA, 2003

⁸HIV and infant feeding: A Guide for Health Care Managers and Supervisors, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UNFPA, 2003

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