An innovative approach towards building core competencies of health professionals for the management of severe malnutrition in infants and children

By

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**Abstract**

Malnutrition is a major cause of death and disability among infants and children. One out of 3 deaths and 20% loss of healthy life years are attributable to malnutrition in all its forms.

Without taking adequate actions to address malnutrition, the UN’s Millennium Development Goal 4, which seeks to reduce under-five mortality, will not be met in many countries. The International Paediatric Association in 2010 resolved that the identification and treatment of severe malnutrition should be a core competency for paediatricians and related health professionals, which was echoed at the 4th African Nutrition Epidemiology Conference.

An important reason behind failure of malnutrition management is limited knowledge and competency of health professionals.It is imperative that their capacity is developed. The WHO’s standard guidelines for malnutritionmanagement has proven to be efficacious and if scaled up, it will reduce childhood mortality by half. One way to achieve this is to provide health professionalswith standardised and accessible training onmalnutrition management outlined in the guidelines.The IMTF and Faculty of Medicine eLearning at the University of Southampton have developed an eLearning course called “Caring for infants and children with Severe Malnutrition”. Designed based onthe WHO’s guidelines, it provides standardised and interactive learning in 3 modules – core concepts, identification andmanagement. By completing it the user will gain the core knowledge and competencies forSAM management.

A study was conducted in Uganda in December 2010 to evaluate the effectiveness of the courseand appropriateness of its delivery.Eight six, including doctors, medical students, nurses and nutritionists, participated in three half-days training. The course was well received for its design and delivery. The meanpre and post test scoreswere37% and 67.5% respectively. Further analysis is in progress and will be reported at a later date.