

eLearning as a solution to train doctors and nurses to manage malnutrition in children

1 S Choi, 2 R Annan, 3 AA Jackson

1. **S Choi**, eLearning Manager, School of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton General Hospital, Southampton SO16 6YD
2. **R Annan**, Research Fellow, IMTF, School of Medicine, University of Southampton, Southampton General Hospital, Southampton SO16 6YD
3. **AA Jackson**, NIHR Diet, Nutrition and Lifestyle Biomedical Research Unit, Southampton Hospital NHS Trust

Background

Many children die unnecessarily from malnutrition. Inadequate knowledge and competency of health professionals limit its effective management. A solution to develop the capacity in malnutrition management is to provide health professionals with standardised and accessible training.

Objective

The IMTF and Faculty of Medicine eLearning teams at the University of Southampton have developed an eLearning course called “Caring for infants and children with severe malnutrition”. By completing this course the user will gain the core knowledge and competencies required for the care and management of severe acute malnutrition.

Methodology

In collaboration with the Uganda Paediatric Association (UPA) and Makerere Medical School, a study was conducted in Uganda in December 2010 to evaluate the effectiveness of the course and appropriateness of its delivery. Using pre- and post- tests and questionnaires, observation, individual interviews, individual diaries and focus groups, the participants’ experience during the study were investigated. Eighty six, comprised of doctors, final year medical students, nurses, midwife trainees and nutritionists, took part in three half-days training and 80 completed it in full.

Results

The course was well received for its design and delivery. Participants’ knowledge improved significantly between the pre- and post-test total scores (mean difference = 29.7, 99%CI, 26.9 to 32.5, $p < 0.001$). Understanding of and competency in the definition, classification, assessment and management of malnutrition also improved (16 participants with good understanding to 66 and 9 being competent to 65 respectively).

Discussion & Conclusions

The study findings showed that by completing the eLearning course participants acquired the core knowledge and competencies required for malnutrition management. eLearning can provide standardised and accessible training for malnutrition management in both developed and developing countries.

Acknowledgement

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