

Report of IMTF Activities at the ICN 2009

Bangkok, Thailand

4-9 October 2009

Introduction

The 19th International Congress of Nutrition was held in Bangkok Thailand from 4-9 October 2009 under the theme “Food Security for All”. It was the first to be held in Asia in 20 years and was attended by several thousand nutrition scientists from all over the world.

The International Malnutrition Task Force (IMTF) of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) held a series of activities during the congress as part of its overall objective to raise the profile of malnutrition as a key focus for child survival. Two 90-minute sessions were organised. The first had the theme “Scaling-up improved treatment of malnutrition to save child lives”, and the second was titled “Integrating community- and facility- based care for treating severe malnutrition in non-emergency settings”.

The Task Force also had a stand within the IUNS booth in the Exhibition Centre to publicise activities of the IMTF, and promote the IMTF website.

IMTF Exhibition

At the IMTF stand, banners and posters in different languages were displayed and the IMTF leaflet, which describes the Task Force’s objectives, activities, governance, and examples of impact, was distributed in English and French. Delegates visiting the stand were invited to suggest ways of widening individual participation in Task Force activities in their respective countries and regions. Contact details were obtained for delegates wishing to join the mailing list or requiring further information.

Also displayed at the stand were the website www.imtf.org, e-learning training resources, and current initiatives. These included the WHO e-learning course on management of severe malnutrition, and a demonstration of a pilot e-learning course to explain the principles of managing acute malnutrition in hospitals and in the community.

IMTF Sessions

Session 1: Scaling-up improved treatment of malnutrition to save child lives

This session was attended by about 700 delegates, and was probably the highest attended parallel session during the ICN. This was partly because the topics chosen for presentation were stimulating and partly because the topic for the panel discussion ‘Was the Government of India right in asking UNICEF to stop distributing Plumpy’Nut?’ had far-reaching implications.

The session was chaired by Prof Alan Jackson and the first speaker was Prof Ricardo Uauy, outgoing President of IUNS, who gave an overview, highlighting the need for action. He recalled the low profile of malnutrition in recent ICNs and how this led to the formation of the Task Force. He pointed to the need for scaling up and said he was glad that an example of such a process has taken place in Bolivia.

Dr Ana Maria Aguilar, in presenting Bolivia as a case study of scaling-up malnutrition treatment and its impact, showed that advocacy and effective lobbying made the management of malnutrition a national issue. This has led to political engagement and support from communities that have improved treatment of malnutrition. The impact has been a drastic reduction in case fatality rates from severe acute malnutrition nationwide.

Dr Steve Collins reported on scaling up treatment of malnutrition in Zambia and Dr Bjorn Ljungqvist presented a case study of Ethiopia: both showed that scaling up is possible and leads to many children receiving treatment. Provision of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) has been an integral component of effective scaling up.

Speakers in the Panel Discussion were Dr Vandana Prasad, Dr Steve Collins, Dr Tahmeed Ahmed and Prof David Sanders. All agreed that Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food was acceptable and effective but RUTF made from locally available foods was considered by some speakers to be more sustainable than importing RUTF. Prof Sanders cautioned against the medicalisation of RUTF.

Session 2:

Integrating community- and facility-based care for treating severe malnutrition in non-emergency situations

The second IMTF session was chaired by Dr Sultana Khanum. The presentations provided national, non-governmental, and international agency perspectives on how to integrate community- and facility- based care in managing severe malnutrition.

The session began by Prof Sanders who explained some of the challenges and opportunities within health services in trying to integrate community and facility based treatment of severe malnutrition. Dr Catherine Mkangama and Dr Tahmeed Ahmed then described examples of integrating community- and facility-based care for treating severe malnutrition in Malawi and Bangladesh respectively. Dr Paluku Bahwere presenting from Agency perspective explained that significant progress in the fight against SAM would be made through building ownerships, harmonising protocols and integrating management of acute malnutrition and IMCI and identifying innovative solutions for sustained supply of therapeutic foods and drugs. Lastly, Dr Francisco Branca who presented on behalf of Zita Weise Prinzo mentioned that WHO, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Nutrition Cluster are developing norms, and standards in the integrated management of SAM. Also, WHO supports countries on policy/programme development on management of SAM and are helping to improve national capacity for managing cases of SAM.

Ready-to-Use-Therapeutic Foods are major components of the integration process. The discussions that followed the presentations were however focussed again on how to make RUTFs locally from culturally acceptable foods.

Though attendance for this session was not as high as the previous session, the presentations and discussions were equally stimulating and interests were high.

IMTF Board Meeting

The IMTF held a board meeting on the last day of the ICN from 13:00 to 14:30 to discuss the way forward in the coming years. Plans include establishment of national and local branches of the Task Force to widen participation and outreach, with an emphasis on involving young members. Given the

need to engage paediatricians, plans were made to feature malnutrition at the International Paediatric Association Congress to be held in Johannesburg, August 4-9th 2010.

The meeting was attended by 10 board members including the outgoing and incoming IUNS Presidents.

Report Compiled by

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