

World Health Organization Model Chapter on “Infant and young child feeding” (IYCF)

WHO, Geneva, 2009 (see the following web site:

<http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/9789241597494/en/index.html>)

Introduction

In this issue of Nutrition News for Africa (NNA) we feature a “model chapter” prepared by the Child and Adolescent Health Unit of the World Health Organization (WHO) on “Infant and young child feeding.” This model chapter is intended for inclusion in text books used by health science faculties for training health professionals; and it summarizes and updates earlier documents on this topic (Brown, 1998; Dewey, 2003; WHO, 2003). The model chapter is divided into 9 sections, which focus on different aspects of breast feeding, complementary feeding, and related maternal health issues, from both clinical and public health perspectives. The document provides a comprehensive overview of major IYCF issues, supplemented with citations for background references and figures to illustrate key points, so it should be of interest to nutritionists working in sub-Saharan Africa. Although selected contents of the document will be of greatest relevance to clinicians involved in primary health care, most of the information should be useful to anyone working on child feeding and nutrition issues in lower-income populations.

Because this edition of NNA refers to a review document, rather than results of a specific research project, we will not follow the typical NNA format. Instead, we will simply provide a description of the main contents of the model chapter and comment on how it might be used to support IYCF programs.

Rationale for and contents of the “model chapter”

This model text book chapter was prepared to ensure that health professionals in training have access to the latest evidence justifying current global IYCF recommendations. The chapter focuses on the nutritional needs and feeding practices of children less than two years of age. The first section presents an overview of the recommended feeding practices, including exclusive breast feeding until six months of age and nutritionally adequate and safe complementary feeding and continued breast feeding from six to 24 months. This section also provides the definitions and current global status of these feeding practices.

The second section on the physiological basis for breast feeding contains information on the composition of colostrum and mature breast milk, including nutrients, anti-infective factors and other bio-active components. The anatomy of the breast and hormonal control of milk synthesis and ejection are then described, as are the importance of infant reflexes and proper attachment to the breast, and suckling and positioning techniques for ensuring successful breastfeeding. Helpful figures accompany the written text.

The third section presents the guiding principles for successful complementary feeding, including information on responsive feeding, the amounts of food energy required at different ages, appropriate feeding frequency, and simple methods for ensuring food safety. The importance of dietary diversity and the nutrients provided by different food groups are discussed.

The following sections describe how best to promote optimal infant feeding practices in maternity facilities and to provide continued support for appropriate IYCF in the community. Information is also provided on how to assess children's growth using the new WHO growth standards, and how to evaluate breast feeding practices by observing a feeding and taking an age-appropriate feeding history. The next sections describe how to assess feeding difficulties and appropriate strategies for managing low birth weight infants, severely malnourished children, and children of mothers with breast engorgement, fissured or inverted nipples, systemic infection, or other medical or emotional problems that can interfere with breast feeding. The final section describes a broad range of policy, health system, and community strategies that can be implemented to promote and support the recommended IYCF practices.

NNA Editors' comments*

This "model chapter" is valuable for two reasons: firstly, it supplies up-to-date recommendations and related technical information on IYCF; secondly, it provides an opportunity to reemphasize the potential importance of pre-service training programs for supporting and strengthening IYCF programs. Promotion of this strategic approach for professional capacity development should be considered by government ministries and NGOs to ensure that national academic centers and government training institutes have access to the latest technical information on IYCF and to encourage them to include these topics in their training curricula. Publication of this type of "model chapter" is a clever approach to facilitate such curricular changes.

References

- Brown KH, Dewey KG, Allen LH. Complementary Feeding of Young Children in Developing Countries: A Review of Current Scientific Knowledge. World Health Organization (WHO/NUT/98.1), Geneva, Switzerland, 1998.
- Dewey KG, Brown KH. Update on technical issues concerning complementary feeding of young children in developing countries and implications for intervention programs. *Food Nutr Bull* 24:5-28, 2003.
- World Health Organization/UNICEF. Global strategy for infant and young child feeding. WHO, Geneva, 2003.

* Note that the Editors' comments and discussion of program and policy implications have been added by the editorial team and are not part of the cited publication.

Other publications received

This month we also received notification of the following publications concerning the West African Nutrition Capacity Development Initiative, which may be of interest to NNA readers. Because the conclusions of the regional capacity development workshop were previously described in NNA (June-July, 2009), the papers will not be reviewed again. Nevertheless, print versions of the documents can be obtained via the HKI Africa Regional Office in Dakar, Senegal.

- Brown KH, McLachlan M, Cardosa P, Tchibindat F, Baker SK. Strengthening public health nutrition research and training capacities in West Africa: Report of a planning workshop convened in Dakar, Senegal from March 26-28, 2009. *Global Public Health*, 5:S1-S19, 2010.

Pepping F. The current capacity for training in public health nutrition in West Africa. *Global Public Health*, 5:S20-S41, 2010.

Aaron GJ, Wilson SE, Brown KH. Bibliographic analysis of scientific research on selected topics in public health nutrition in West Africa: review of articles published from 1998 to 2008. *Global Public Health*, 5: S42-S57, 2010.

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