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Project Title: Preventing Malnutrition in Children Under-5 years Using Affordable Local Foods at a Referral Hospital, Ghana.

Abstract

Background: Malnutrition is a universal problem that affects children under-five years and a major cause of death in children worldwide. About 60% of the 10.2 million annual mortality rates of children under-five years globally is caused by malnutrition. Children at risk must be reached during their first two years of life for early diagnosis of malnutrition with adequate management to prevent morbidity and subsequent mortality. In Ghana, mothers lack understanding of the nutritional value of local foods in their children’s meals. Purpose: To increase the knowledge of mothers on malnutrition and the use of local food sources to prevent malnutrition in children under-five years. Methods: Questionnaires were used to assess the knowledge of sixty seven (N= 67) mothers on malnutrition and current complementary feeding practices. Five live cooking and health education sessions were held at the Child Welfare Clinic with a focus on affordable local food sources using the National Food Guide. Mothers were educated on the need to continue breastfeeding up to two years. A post-test was used to determine any changes after education sessions. Results: Overall, 58.2% of the 67 participants attributed malnutrition to spiritual causes and 90% preferred ready-to-eat complementary foods. Post-test analyses showed that 94.8% of the mothers had gained knowledge on the causes of malnutrition as a dietary deficiency and 82% were ready to use local food sources. Conclusion: Parents of children under-five years need continuous education on affordability and use of local foods in the continuum of care. Implications: Community and Public Health nurses need to intensify education on the preparation, use and storage of local foods to prevent malnutrition in children under-5 years. Further research is needed into mothers’ understanding of spirituality and its relational cause to malnutrition. Parents’ socio-cultural beliefs impacting the usage of local food sources in children’s meals need to be explored. Policy directives from the Ministry of Health, Ghana are needed to allow free access to nutritious meals and food subventions for children with malnutrition. Health administrators must provide logistics for training frontline child health care providers on the prevention and management of malnutrition at primary health care levels.

Key Words: Maternal and Child Health, Malnutrition in children under 5 years
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