

Development of a Public Health Nutrition Workforce: Nurses and Midwives in Ghana

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In Ghana, nurses and midwives play a vital role as frontline health care providers and are often responsible for delivering nutrition services at national, regional, and district referral hospitals, health centers, and community-based health planning services. It is essential that all nurses and midwives have the knowledge and skills to deliver quality nutrition services and are abreast of the most recent nutrition policies, guidelines, and protocols. New nutrition interventions are typically introduced to health workers, particularly nurses and midwives, through in-service training. However, a major challenge with in-service training is the high rate of staff attrition, leading to reduced quality of services and the need for frequent and repeated training. In addition, frontline workers often perceive new skills acquired through in-service training as add-ons to their standard responsibilities and do not feel as accountable for providing such services. Integrating and strengthening nutrition in pre-service training can ensure that nutrition becomes a key responsibility of frontline health workers from the very beginning of their training, improving accountability for and ownership of the nutrition services they are expected to deliver.

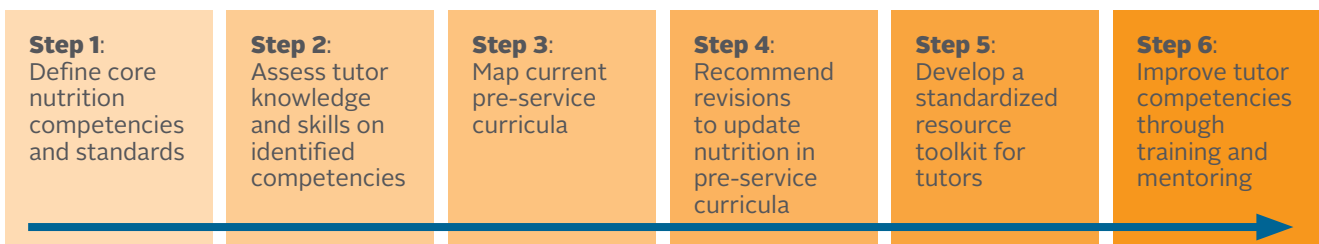
To address this challenge, the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance III Project (FANTA) collaborated with the Ghana Ministry of Health, the Ghana Health Service, and the Maternal and Child Health Integrated Program to implement a competency-based training approach to strengthen nutrition in pre-service training for nurses, midwives, and community nutrition officers. First, the expected nutrition competencies for tutors

Increasing the skills and knowledge of tutors to teach up-to-date national nutrition curricula can lead to the creation of a more highly skilled nutrition workforce and can result in cost savings by limiting the need for repeated in-service training to bring the skills of new graduates up to national standards.

teaching community health nursing, public health nursing, general registered nursing, and midwifery training programs were defined. Second, tutors teaching nutrition at the midwifery and nursing schools were assessed through observations and interviews to determine if they possessed the skills to adequately train others on the required nutrition competencies. Next, the pre-service nutrition curricula for nurses and midwives was mapped against the defined nutrition competencies that nurses and midwives need to know before entering the workforce and the 2007 nurses and midwives curricula was reviewed and updated. A standardized resource toolkit was provided to tutors, who were then trained and mentored on its use and application (see Figure 1).

The results from the assessment of competencies (Step 2) indicated that tutors lacked skills in some concepts related to maternal nutrition and infant and young child feeding, especially with regard to new nutrition guidance and interventions, such as the new breastfeeding recommendations for HIV-positive mothers and community-based management of acute malnutrition (CMAM). A knowledge score below 33% was categorized as poor and in need of strengthening,

Figure 1. Steps in the process of strengthening pre-service curricula and training to improve nutrition service delivery by frontline workers



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while that above 70% was considered good. Table 1 shows that only 1 of 10 performance areas was considered good, 3 were average, and 7 poor, including the skills of nutrition assessment and nutrition counseling in infant and young child feeding.

These findings can be partially explained by the fact that the nurses and midwives curricula lacked updated nutrition content and tutors had not received any technical updates on the current nutrition policies, strategies, and approaches. Additionally, tutors reported that they did not have standardized reference materials to teach nutrition, and demonstration laboratories were not adequately equipped with basic equipment and tools such as electronic scales, mid-upper arm circumference tapes, body mass index reference tables or wheels, counseling guides, nutrition guidelines, and treatment protocols.

To respond to these issues, a resource toolkit, which included reference materials and session plans, was created to assist tutors with teaching on the required nutrition competencies. The resource toolkit was provided to all tutors and nursing and midwifery training institutions, and resources such as policies, treatment protocols, body mass index reference tables and wheels and mid-upper arm circumference tapes were delivered to school libraries and demonstration laboratories. In addition, tutors' skills were strengthened through training and clinical practice in three key nutrition areas: infant and young child feeding, CMAM outpatient care, and CMAM inpatient care. All 132 tutors teaching nutrition in government registered nursing and midwifery schools across the country were included in the training and clinical practice sessions. This was essential to ensure that all students trained by tutors through their respective institutions were trained in a consistent and standardized manner to elevate the national standards for nutrition service delivery by frontline workers.

Following the assessment, resource toolkit development, and curricula update, the Ghana Health

Table 1. Results of the assessment of tutor competencies related to knowledge and skills in nutrition

| | Average Score (%) | Classification |
|---|-------------------|----------------|
| Knowledge of: | | |
| Prevention of micronutrient deficiencies | 71% | Good |
| Nutrition assessment (anthropometry and clinical) | 64% | Average |
| Complementary feeding | 52% | Average |
| Basic nutrition | 45% | Average |
| Breastfeeding and lactation management | 22% | Poor |
| Maternal nutrition | 11% | Poor |
| Inpatient care management of severe acute malnutrition with medical complications | 7% | Poor |
| Outpatient care management of severe acute malnutrition without medical complications | 0% | Poor |
| Skills in: | | |
| Nutrition assessment | 20% | Poor |
| Nutrition counseling on infant and young child feeding | 3% | Poor |

Service, in collaboration with partners, conducted orientation sessions with nursing and midwifery tutors on how to use the resource toolkit, and undertook mentorship visits to nursing and midwifery schools ensuring that the tutors acquired the needed skills to effectively teach the updated nutrition curricula content. A new competency-based nursing and midwifery curricula, which includes the defined nutrition competencies, has been finalized and adopted by the Ghana Nursing and Midwifery Council. The updated curricula is awaiting final dissemination, after which it will be utilized by all nursing and midwifery schools in the country.

For further information please visit www.fantaproject.org

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