

Abstract for TropEd website

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Title: Treatment of severe acute malnutrition in infants <6 months in Niger

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Abstract

Objective: Management of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in infants <6 months has been poorly addressed. To contribute to fill in this knowledge gap the results of a nutritional rehabilitation program in Niger are reported. *Study design:* Presentation of a case series (n=632) of young infants who self-presented to a nutrition rehabilitation program in 2010-11. Main characteristics of the inpatient treatment protocol were: diluted F-100 milk via the supplementary suckling technique until exclusive breastfeeding was re-initialized; coaching of mothers on infant feeding and intensive antibiotic therapy if indicated during stabilisation phase. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 103 mothers. *Results:* The recovery, mortality and defaulter rates were 85% (537/632), 6% (37/632) and 9% (55/632), respectively. A majority of infants suffered from infectious diseases at entry (81%), particularly from acute watery diarrhoea and respiratory tract infections. Infection on admission was a predictor of death during treatment (OR=3.9; 95%CI: 1.6, 9.2). Anorexia at entry was a risk factor for treatment failure (OR= 4.4; 95%CI: 1.71, 11.1). Interviews revealed very rare exclusive breastfeeding (3%), with delayed initiation in 68% of cases. Traditional beliefs, perceived insufficient breast milk and psychological problems played important roles for feeding choices. *Conclusions:* SAM in infants <6 months can be successfully treated by managing cases as inpatients with an adapted protocol, intensive clinical supervision and intensive drug treatment, if indicated. It remains to be verified if similar outcomes are achievable in community-based programs. Effective interventions for improvement of breastfeeding practices are needed.