

SECRET

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MEMORANDUM OF THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH ON THE INTEGRATION OF NUTRITION SERVICES INTO THE NIGERIAN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM USING NUTRITION ASSESSMENT COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT (NACS) APPROACH

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to request the approval of the Council for the integration of Nutrition into the Nigerian Health Care System using the Nutrition Assessment Counselling and Support (NACS) Approach.

2. BACKGROUND

The scourge of malnutrition in form of over nutrition, under nutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are conditions that weaken the immune system, worsen illnesses and contribute to economic losses through palliative care, therapeutic care and prolonged medications for management of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Malnutrition contributes to 53% of all deaths among under-five children According to the 2013NDHS, the stunting rate is put at 37% while 2015NNHS puts it at 33%. In the same vein, 2013 NDHS and 2015 NNHS put wasting rate at 18% and 7.2% respectively. The underweight indices have reported at 29% and 19.4% respectively for 2013 NDHS and 2015 NNHS. All forms of Malnutrition are silent killers including increase in obesity being observed among adolescent girls and women. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be attained without addressing the problems of malnutrition through nutritional care services.

Moreover, Infant and Young Child Nutrition data shows that Nigeria is below the average global index. Empirical data from 2013 NDHS and 2014 NNHS have shown indices of suboptimal Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices in Nigeria: Early initiation of breastfeeding is put at 33% and 21.5% respectively while exclusive breastfeeding rates of 17% from 2013 NDHS and 25.2% from 2014 NNHS are reported. The mean duration of breastfeeding of 18.3months is still below the National Recommendation of two years or beyond. In fact, only 10% of the children 6-23months are fed optimally in line with recommended Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) practices. Suboptimal feeding practices compounded with the unhealthy lifestyles of the Women of Reproductive age has resulted to the maternal malnutrition indices of 7.4%.

In addition, over nutrition indices among the infants and young children as well as the women of reproductive age show that Nigeria needs to be at alert considering the prevailing eating and sedentary lifestyles in the society.

The Nutrition Assessment Counseling and Support (NACS) approach is a diagnostic, preventive and supportive measure for early detection of malnutrition and diet-related diseases that target every population in the human life cycle. NACS ensures that complete nutritional care package is offered to every client who visits health facilities with continuous nutrition education and counselling for optimal behavioral change and practices.

3. ISSUES AND JUSTIFICATION

In Nigeria, utilization and interpretation of nutrition status to clients among health workers is generally poor. Nutrition Services need to be made active and not passive in the health facilities by facilitating the implementation of complete nutrition package and strengthening Health Care Providers to deliver appropriate counselling and support routinely.

Assessments are being carried out at various health facilities with disparity at different physiological ages. For instance, children 0-59months are assessed during Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) and Community Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) services while other age groups are left out. Presently, routine growth monitoring sessions which elapse by the child's fifth birthday is rarely conducted when immunization is completed at child's first birthday. Even when assessment is conducted, comprehensive counselling and support services are not offered. Moreover, there is need for nutrition assessment counseling and support at the other age groups including School age, Adolescents, Adults and Geriatrics/Elderly. This calls for integrated delivery of nutrition services for all age groups.

In addition, Nutritional care beyond infant and young child needs to include all physiological age groups; i.e. School age children, Adolescents, Women of Child Bearing age and Adults) in the human life cycle. This will contribute to reduction of non-communicable diseases that are prevalent in the later years of life. Access to quality, functional nutrition services in the health facility being the basis for all clients will contribute to increased number of clients utilizing the services delivered at all levels of care {Primary Health Care Centres and Referrals} thereby making them functional.

NACS strengthens and appropriately integrates nutritional care and support into routine health services. It strengthens effective quality data collection, collation, analysis and documentation in the facility and ensures service providers proffer solution according to clients' peculiarity.

NACS also ensures proper documentation of Nutrition Routine activities to align with the consistent data flow in the National Health Management Information System (NHMIS).

Nutrition Education/Counselling is an essential component of NACS for behavioral change on improved dietary habit. Maximizing the positive impact of NACS is therefore paramount that nutrition programme involving assessment, nutrition counselling and support for improved healthy life be comprehensively integrated into basic health Care Services in Nigeria.

NACS Training Manual, Job Aids for Health workers and clients' fliers have been adapted for all levels and approved by Honourable Minister of Health to utilize them for quality service delivery across the Federation.

4. PRAYERS:

Council is hereby invited to note as follows:

- i. There is no policy statement to enable equitable and routine integrated access to nutrition services for all physiological age groups in all health facilities;
- ii. The NACS Training Manual was adopted by Federal Ministry of Health with inputs from relevant Stakeholders and endorsed by the Honourable Minister as evidence of political commitment to utilize the policy documents for quality service delivery across the Federation.
- iii. In accordance with the concept of one PHC per ward, which has Nutrition as part of the essential package of care, NACS approach will enhance promotion of optimal health, early detection of malnutrition and prevention of Diet-Related Non-Communicable Diseases (DRNCD).
- iv. NACS approach is in consonance with the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, Adolescent Health and Nutrition (RMNCAH+N) component of the Second National Strategic Health Development Plan {NSHDPII} as well as the National Strategic Plan of Action for Nutrition (NSPAN) of the National Policy on Food and Nutrition, which are aimed at achieving Universal Health Coverage in Nigeria.

- v. Utilization of the NACS Training manual for cascading training will provide harmony and quality service delivery for routine integrated nutrition services in basic health care delivery.

Council is further invited to approve:

- I. The utilization of NACS approach at all levels of care for effective routine nutrition service delivery for optimal impact on the nutritional status of the Nigerian populace.
- II. The National roll out of training of Health workers at all levels using the developed training manuals.

Honorable Minister of Health

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