

Short Communication

## **The HIFA and the HealthPhone: Laying the Foundation for Combating Malnutrition in India**

Sankalp Yadav<sup>1</sup>, Gautam Rawal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>General Duty Medical Officer-II, Chest Clinic Moti Nagar, North Delhi Municipal Corporation, New Delhi, India.

<sup>2</sup>Attending Consultant, Critical Care, Rockland Hospital, Qutab Institutional Area, New Delhi, India.

Corresponding Author: Sankalp Yadav

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### **ABSTRACT**

Malnutrition remains a major threat to the survival, growth and development of children. In response to this major challenge, and one of the key decisions of Prime Minister's Council on India's Nutrition Challenges, Ministry of Women and Child Development prepared an Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign against malnutrition. The overall objective of this nationwide IEC campaign against malnutrition is to address issues of status of women, the care of pregnant mothers and children under two, breastfeeding and the importance of balanced nutrition and health. The present article highlights the important points associated with this campaign and are extracted from the HIFA Quotations (short extracts from HIFA discussions) from HIFA discussions on the HealthPhone: Laying the Foundation for Combating Malnutrition in India.

**Key words:** HealthPhone, HIFA, Malnutrition.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Healthcare Information For All (HIFA) 2015 campaign was launched in 2006 with the shared goal that “by 2015, every person worldwide will have access to an informed healthcare provider.” Since its launch, HIFA2015 has grown to more than 10000 members representing 2000 organizations in 167 countries. <sup>[1]</sup> HIFA is a global forum, which provides space for professionals from all parts of the world to exchange views and share knowledge. <sup>[1]</sup> Below are the HIFA Quotations (short extracts from HIFA discussions, selected by the HIFA moderator Dr. Neil Pakenham-Walsh) from HIFA discussions

on the HealthPhone: Laying the Foundation for Combating Malnutrition in India, from 18<sup>th</sup> April to 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014. These and many other HIFA Quotations are available on the HIFA Voices database: go to ‘Search HIFA Quotations’ on [www.hifavoices.org](http://www.hifavoices.org) and add HealthPhone into the title search field.

Each HIFA Quotation below includes a link to the relevant part of the HIFA Voices database, from where the user can, if needed, link “up” to the original discussion threads archived on Dgroups. Besides, this document will be continually expanded with selected contents on subsequent HIFA discussions.

Mr. Nand Wadhvani [Founding Trustee of The Mother and Child Health and Education Trust (MCHET)] highlighted, “Malnutrition remains a major threat to the survival, growth and development of children. In response to this major challenge, and one of the key decisions of Prime Minister's Council on India's Nutrition Challenges, Ministry of Women and Child Development prepared an Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign against malnutrition. The overall objective of this nationwide IEC campaign against malnutrition is to address issues of status of women, the care of pregnant mothers and children under two, breastfeeding and the importance of balanced nutrition and health. The nationwide campaign has been designed in 18 different languages. The media mix includes television, radio, electronic print, outdoor and digital media besides the traditional methods of folk and field publicity.

The Media campaign has four stages:

Stage 1 - Create Awareness: About the symptoms and alarming consequences of malnutrition

Stage 2 - Clarion Call: Encouraging the masses to come together to take a pledge to fight malnutrition

Stage 3 - Action to prevent malnutrition: Simple things you can do to prevent malnutrition

Stage 4 - Mother & Child Protection Card: A simple yet powerful card that helps you to consistently monitor the nutrition and growth of your child

HealthPhone is collaborating with the Indian Academy of Pediatrics, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, UNICEF, pro bono services of Mr. Aamir Khan and with support from Vodafone by making these videos more widely available on mobile

phones, PCs and tablets to the population at large. <sup>[2]</sup>

<http://www.hifavoices.org/quotation/healthphone-laying-foundation-combating-malnutrition-india-3>

Early Evidence: Videos can improve health behaviors

“Videos are a very powerful communication channel for reaching the community with important health information. In particular, videos that have an authority figure in them, such as a doctor in a lab coat, are very convincing while also providing entertainment. Field workers also appreciate these because it reinforces the messages they are giving during counseling sessions.” K4Health in Bangladesh. <sup>[3]</sup>

<http://www.k4health.org/blog/post/early-evidence-videos-can-improve-health-behaviors>

“Actions taken by parents to help sick children are the most significant factors determining differences in child survival.” Charles Kenny, Getting Better: Why Global Development Is Succeeding - And How We Can Improve the World Even More. <sup>[4]</sup>

<http://charleskenny.blogs.com/weblog/2011/02/getting-better-why-global-development-is-succeeding-and-how-we-can-improve-the-world-even-more.html>

“Between 1970 and 2009, mortality in children under age 5 dropped from 16 million to 7.8 million annually, and IHME researchers estimate that 51% of the reduction can be linked to increased education among women of reproductive age.” The Lancet: Increased educational attainment and its effect on child mortality in 175 countries between 1970 and 2009: a systematic analysis. <sup>[5]</sup>

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)61257-3/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)61257-3/abstract)

Rising education levels among women save children's lives worldwide.<sup>[6]</sup>

<http://www.healthmetricsandevaluation.org/news-events/news-release/rising-education-levels-among-women-save-childrens-lives-worldwide>

## CONCLUSIONS

On the preliminary results

“[HealthPhone] Anecdotal evidence and behavior change noticed:

- Increased use of ORS and Zinc during diarrhea episodes;
- Increased frequency, at critical times, of hand washing using soap and water;
- A rise in early and exclusive breastfeeding rates and
- More mothers and children getting a full round of their routine immunization.

Result:

- Fewer maternal & child deaths;
- Improved nutrition;
- Fewer occurrences and less effect of major infectious diseases

The Maharashtra Government (population 118 million) is now expanding the programme and will provide every frontline health worker (181,000) with a HealthPhone microSD memory card with a comprehensive library of how-to health and nutrition educational videos which they can use to learn, share and teach the families that they serve. This programme may be further extended to doctors, adolescent girls, women, mothers and especially mothers-to-be.

Regarding: "...what challenges you have noticed and whether you thought this initiative was sustainable in the long term."

The greatest challenge is the funding of video content. Since we could not reach them directly before, video content created in the past was not aimed at mothers; it was aimed at health workers. Two different approaches required to bring about change. There aren't sufficient and comprehensive

libraries of knowledge videos, in local languages, to cover the essential health and nutrition topics for mothers, husbands, mother-in-laws and the population at large.

Other challenges of translation of existing content to local languages, distribution, user interfaces, adaptability to the wide variety of mobile handsets and platforms can and are being resolved over time. I see the implementation of HealthPhone not as an On/Off switch; it is more like a dimmer switch. It will take time and will gradually be embraced by more and more governments, UNOs and NGOs.

Studies show that for every dollar spent on prevention there is a saving of 19 dollars currently being spent on treatment, control and management of diseases. So yes, I think that governments, and citizens, will begin to reap the benefits and larger portions of health budgets, as well as donor contributions, will be directed towards prevention. This will make it sustainable in the long term.” Nand Wadhvani, India.<sup>[7]</sup>

<http://www.hifavoices.org/quotation/healthphone-laying-foundation-combating-malnutrition-india-5>

Miscellaneous

<http://healthphone.org>

Join HIFA: [www.hifa2015.org](http://www.hifa2015.org)

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**Conflicts of interest:** Dr. Sankalp Yadav is also the country representative of the HIFA2015 for India. The position of country representative of HIFA2015 is a voluntary unpaid position. We declare that we have no other conflicts of interest.

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