

# Title

## KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO COUNSEL ON INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING DURING AND AFTER ILLNESS AMONG COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEERS IN TURKANA COUNTY, KENYA

# Authors

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### BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Appropriate infant and young child feeding (IYCF) for a sick child includes continuing to feed during illness and feeding extra after recovery. These critical recommendations ensure children effectively fight illness, experience minimum weight loss, and recover quickly. Programs such as integrated community case management (iCCM) include IYCF for sick children. In Kenya, community health volunteers (CHVs) provide an essential link to the health system by promoting health and preventing disease in their communities. Although CHVs implement iCCM, which focuses on disease treatment, it is unclear what level of counseling they provide to support IYCF of sick children. The objective of this study was to examine whether and how CHVs have the knowledge and skills to counsel caregivers on IYCF during and after illness.

### METHODS

In Kenya, we purposively selected two sub-counties within Turkana County, Loima, and Turkana Central. We conducted 36 in depth interviews and four focus group discussions with national, county, and sub-county health managers; community health extension workers; community health committee members; CHVs; and mothers of children under five. We also reviewed the CHV basic module and iCCM training manual to assess whether the manual provides the knowledge and skills for counseling on feeding during and after illness. Once the findings were shared internally, we facilitated a validation workshop with health managers from the county, health managers from six sub-counties (including Loima and Turkana Central), and community health extension workers to confirm the study findings aligned with CHV counseling practices in Turkana County.

### RESULTS

Mothers reported that messages on feeding a sick child from CHVs were on continuing to feed during illness with much of the focus on giving fruits (e.g., banana, oranges, and mangoes). In their responses, mothers did not distinguish between what CHVs recommended for a sick child under 6 months and those between 6–59 months. CHVs confirmed this finding. Neither mothers nor CHVs described how to feed during the recuperative period after illness. The iCCM training manual for CHVs provides knowledge on how to feed solids during illness, but does not cover age-appropriate information on how to feed during and after illness. Further, the manual does not give CHVs an opportunity to practice counseling on sick child feeding.



**“Since anybody who is unwell lacks appetite...At least you have to feed with [a] balance diet, something like oranges, something like porridge at least with little fat/oil.”**

— CHV, Loima

**“You can buy an orange and blend juice for that child; you can try a ripe banana also. You can also try meat stew and even porridge...That is what we are taught by CHVs on the feeding of the sick child should be fruits.”**

— Caregiver, Loima

### KEY TAKE-AWAY

Training community health volunteers to provide sick child feeding guidance to caregivers of under five children during integrated community case management counseling is essential to prevent malnutrition.



Photo Credit: Fintrac, Inc.

### CONCLUSIONS

CHVs did not counsel mothers on age-appropriate IYCF during and after illness because the iCCM training manual does not cover this topic adequately. The Government of Kenya should revise the sick child feeding component of the iCCM training manual and train CHVs using the revised manual on how to counsel caregivers on feeding their children during and after illness.



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