Technical consultation to identify priority areas for counselling and support to improve breastfeeding practices

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Background

Breastfeeding is one of the foundations of child health, development and survival, especially where diarrhoea, pneumonia and undernutrition are common causes of under-5 mortality. Breastfeeding also helps reduce overweight and obesity and protects maternal health. For these reasons, WHO recommends “exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life is the recommended way of feeding infants, followed by continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary foods for up to 2 years or beyond.”

Women need support in order to optimise the chances of breastfeeding in line with WHO’s recommendations. Currently, only 45% of newborns are breastfed in the first hour after birth; only 43% of infants are exclusively breastfed until 6 months of age and, at 2 years of age only 46% of children are still breastfed.

High quality evidence affirms that facility- and community-based interventions improve the quality of infant feeding practices, including among mothers living with HIV. However, while WHO has developed a number of training courses and tools in support of exclusive and continued breastfeeding, a number of specific issues related to breastfeeding counselling and support are not addressed as specific recommendations in guidelines.

In May 2007, WHO established a Guideline Review Committee (GRC) to standardise processes and procedures for developing WHO guidelines. All WHO guidelines now follow the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) methodology. This involves an initial scoping of priority areas by a guideline development group (GDG), commissioning of relevant systematic reviews, drafting of recommendations and a face-to-face meeting of the GDG to review and approve the recommendations. (WHO handbook for guideline development, 2014)

Transparency and objectivity are central to the processes.

In order to provide clear and specific guidance on improving breastfeeding practices globally, the Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (MCA) in collaboration with the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development (NHD) and UNICEF aim to identify priority areas and opportunities for counselling and support to improve breastfeeding practices, including approaches for improving practices in emergency settings and among vulnerable populations.

3 www.gradeworkinggroup.org.
Aim
To improve child survival and development and maternal wellbeing through improved support for breastfeeding practices

Objectives of the technical consultation

- To identify the gaps in guidance related to counselling and support for improving breastfeeding practices;
- To prioritise the areas for development of WHO recommendations and guidelines related to counselling and support to improve breastfeeding practices;
- To formulate the PICO questions in preparation of commissioning of systematic reviews related to counselling and support to improve breastfeeding practices;
- To adapt recommendations to address the needs of breastfeeding mothers in emergency and other vulnerable settings.

Expected outcomes

1. Areas identified for development of WHO recommendations and guidelines related to counselling and support to improve breastfeeding practices;
2. PICO questions formulated to inform systematic reviews related to counselling and support to improve breastfeeding practices

Please contact mncah@who.int for more information.
Please include ‘Counselling and support to improve breastfeeding practices’ in the Subject heading.