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Interning at the Médecins Sans Frontières Operational Office in Geneva

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SIT Study Abroad

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Interning at the Médecins Sans Frontières Operational Office in Geneva

By Casie Reiss

Fall Semester 2008

School for International Training
Geneva: Development Studies and Public Health
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Abstract

The following report outlines and analyzes the internship and interactive research undertaken by the student, Casie Reiss, during the independent research period. The one-month internship was completed at the Médecins Sans Frontières Operational Office in Geneva in the Operational Communications Department. The subject of research was “The evolution of public positions of the main actors involved in addressing malnutrition.”

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude towards the staff at the Médecins Sans Frontières Operational Office in Geneva for their warm welcome in to the MSF work community and their continuous support throughout my internship period in Geneva. I am particularly grateful to Aurélie Gremaud and Huub Verhagen for supervising my internship and research at MSF and to Thomas Kurmann and Emma Amado for their encouragement and support before, during, and after my internship at MSF.

I would also like to thank my co-workers in the Operational Communications Department for making me feel like part of the ‘ComOp’ team.

I am most grateful to Dr. Earl Noelte and Ms. Anne Borrel for their continuous support, encouragement, and advising during the course of my semester in Switzerland. Their devotion to my academic, personal, and professional endeavors has provided me with innumerable learning outcomes and has been an integral part of my experience this fall.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction _____

Objective _____

Methodology _____

Learning Outcomes _____

Results _____

'Next steps' _____

Conclusion _____

Work Journal

Chronology _____

External Discussions _____

Human Resources _____

Interactive Research Log _____

Annex

MSF Public Archive Analysis _____

SIT Cultural Drop-Off Paper: "Médecins Sans Frontières: Interning and working for a humanitarian NGO in Swiss civil society" _____

SIT Literature Review Essay: "Quality vs. Quantity: An analysis of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods for the treatment of acute malnutrition in children under five years." _____

Curriculum Vitae _____

INTRODUCTION

Motivation

For the interactive research project, I chose to pursue an internship at the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Operational Office in Geneva. I had taken a prior interest in program responses to malnutrition during the course of the semester here in Switzerland and was particularly drawn towards MSF for their unique and controversial stance on using Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods in cases of both moderate and severe malnutrition.

Additionally, as I am nearing the end of my undergraduate studies, I identified MSF as a potential employer and felt that an internship at one of their operational offices would be a beneficial way to confirm or refute my desire to pursue employment within the organization. One of the specific goals I had set out for myself during the course of this semester was to pursue future employment opportunities in Switzerland within humanitarian organizations so that I may potentially have a job offer from one of these organizations by the time I graduate in May of the upcoming year.

Setting

The Independent Research Project Internship took place at the MSF Operational Office in Geneva with the Operational Communications team. I was present at the internship Monday thru Friday during the working month of November (Monday, 3 November – Friday, 28 November) from 9h00 – 18h00. I was supervised by Aurélie Gremaud, Head of Operational Communications, and Huub Verhagen, Head of the Nutrition Working Group. I was given a desk and computer to work on, internet access,

as well as access to the MSF shared user-drive. In addition I was given access to “Factiva,” the research database MSF uses.

OBJECTIVE

Purpose

The purpose of the internship with MSF was to gain academic and professional learning outcomes in an interactive working environment. I specifically chose to complete the internship because I wanted to use my time in Geneva participating interactively within an international organization, given that I would not be able to back in the United States. While I am fully capable of researching and analyzing a topic in the US, I am not able to be an active part of a Geneva-based NGO nor am I able to be an interactive part of the MSF organization specific to Switzerland. For these reasons, the purpose of my interactive presence within the MSF organization in Geneva was particularly significant to developing my learning and experiential outcomes while on the SIT Development Studies and Public Health Semester.

Academically the internship would provide me with topical knowledge on malnutrition and Swiss non-governmental organizations. In addition, the internship would allow me to apply and develop my learning from the SIT Development Studies and Public Health Thematic Seminar and the SIT Field Studies Seminar. The internship would also serve in my French language studies, as the majority of the people working at MSF speak French and many meetings are conducted in this language.

Professionally the internship would provide me with an environment to develop working skills and gain professional experience in the context of a medical humanitarian

non-governmental organization (NGO.) In addition, the work I would provide during the course of the internship would provide MSF with valuable research and a functional report for the organization to use in discussions and debates with other actors involved in addressing malnutrition.

Responsibilities

My main responsibility at the MSF Office in Geneva was to research and prepare a report on the evolution of positions of the main actors involved in malnutrition. During the process of researching and writing an analysis I was to regularly meet with my supervisors, Ms. Aurélie Gremaud and Mr. Huub Verhagen, for advising and direction.

Secondary responsibilities were a result of scheduling; the only other native English-speaking intern did not work on Mondays so I was asked to complete tasks that she typically worked on when she was in the office. These tasks included: researching articles to be used as reference documents for press meetings, composing emails in English, and assisting with writing English titles for soon-to-be published reports.

When I first accepted the internship at MSF, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work with their organization at one of the operational offices. As I have long respected MSF for their work in the field, I was more than willing to work in any area of the organization that was available to me. Though I expressed an interest in malnutrition specifically when meeting with Mr. Kurmann, I also noted that if there were not any openings specific to this topic that I would be willing to work in another department in order to gain interactive experience within this particular humanitarian NGO. When I was offered the intern position in Operational Communications I accepted without hesitation, as I was happy to be an interactive part of MSF and saw many potential learning

outcomes from this position. Once I received my assignment within the department, however, I began to realize that working in communications, though a necessary and important part of MSF, was not what I had a particular interest in. In addition, I felt that my research assignment was not as interactive as I thought an internship position would have been and was worried that I would not gain all of the learning outcomes I had set out to attain during the Interactive Research period. Luckily, my worries proved to be ill-founded, and I discovered that with continuous hard work and the utilization of observational skills, I would learn far more than I had expected.

Activities

There were four types of meetings I attended during my internship at the MSF Office in Geneva; the ‘morning meeting,’ the ‘Thursday meeting,’ the Monday Operational Communication team meeting, and the monthly Communications Department meeting.

‘Morning meetings’ took place at 9:30am in the basement of the MSF Office in Geneva. At these meetings each ‘desk’ (an operational team coordinating field missions in a small grouping of countries,) would present significant events or information to all MSF staff. Presence at these meetings was not required, however; many of the staff attended each morning due to the value of information presented. Typically these meetings lasted about 15 minutes and were conducted in English.

The ‘Thursday meetings’ took place in the basement meeting room of the MSF Office in Geneva on Thursday afternoons at 11:30am. 2-3 half-hour presentations took place at these meetings, and ranged from field updates to internal campaign launches. Presence at these meetings was not required, though highly recommended. This meeting was run by

the presenting staff members. Typically these meetings lasted about 1.5-2 hours and were conducted in English.

The Monday Operational Communication team meetings took place in the meeting room of the Operational Communications team on the first floor of the MSF Office in Geneva around 11:00am on Monday afternoons. The entire Operational Communications team was required to be present at these meetings to review the upcoming week's schedule, discuss current projects, and delegate new assignments. Frequently other MSF offices were included in these meetings via teleconference, and were a part of discussions primarily on field projects or press conferences. These meetings were run primarily by Ms. Gremaud, however; each team member presented his or her respective projects and discussed what he or she would be doing in the upcoming week. These meetings typically lasted about 2 hours and were conducted in French, although phone conferences were sometimes conducted in English.

The monthly Communications Department meetings take place in the basement meeting room of the MSF Office in Geneva on the last Thursday of every month at 9:00am. All communications departments are required to be present at these meetings. Thomas Kurmann runs these meetings and presents current issues within the Communications Departments. The MSF Office in Zurich is included in these meetings via video feed. The meeting I attended for the month of November lasted about 1.5 hours and was conducted in French.

METHODOLOGY

Application of skills and techniques

Many of the skills and techniques I developed during the Field Study Seminar were utilized during the course of the interactive research period. I had learned from previous assignments how many experts in the field were willing to talk and provide assistance when able and available. I had also learned that taking the time to track down phone numbers and calling the person whom you were trying to meet was often times much more effective than sending an email and waiting for a reply. I chose to apply these learning outcomes before the start of the interactive research period in order to obtain an internship at MSF. I directly called Mr. Kurmann to see if he would have the time to speak with me about internship possibilities at the MSF office in Geneva, and sure enough, he said I could come in that same day for 10-15 minutes of discussion. Taking this initiative was successful; after meeting with Mr. Kurmann he distributed my CV to the MSF departments and had an internship offer for me by the next afternoon.

After obtaining the internship position at MSF and receiving my research assignment, I began to use the research skills I developed during the Field Study and the knowledge base I had gained on malnutrition and the MSF organization from previous assignments. Having these solid foundations allowed me to efficiently navigate through familiar organizational databases on the WHO, WFP and MSF websites. In addition, I began to learn where the relevant information was found on these websites, further adding to the efficiency of my research.

I applied critical thinking and analytical writing skills during the final week of my internship at MSF as I incorporated my findings in to a final report. Having developed these skills throughout my college career and particularly through the Literature Review Essay, I felt confident in my ability to analyze the research I had compiled and

communicate it effectively and clearly in writing. My ability to utilize this communication skill was essential in developing a professional report that could be distributed internally within the MSF organization. I am pleased that my analytical skills, writing ability, and knowledge of the issues around malnutrition warranted the opportunity to compose an internal document for MSF.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Academic

The academic learning outcomes that resulted from my internship at the MSF office in Geneva included increased knowledge of NGOs, malnutrition, the French language, and the MSF organization.

Primarily my knowledge of NGOs and malnutrition resulted from the research of my assignment. As I spent nearly two weeks gathering information on the public positioning and explicit discourse around malnutrition from a variety of actors involved with addressing malnutrition, my knowledge of these organizations increased dramatically. I learned about each organization's stance on malnutrition, their motivations for addressing malnutrition, and their programming strategies for addressing malnutrition. In addition, I was able to learn how closely these organizations align with MSF's stance on these issues.

One of the most significant topical learning outcomes I gained was knowledge of how different positioning on causes, programming strategies, and motivations are in regards to malnutrition. Through my research I learned that the discourse around malnutrition is often inconsistent and that programming strategies are incredibly diverse. I was most

surprised by statements from the World Bank. The World Bank primarily argued that poverty is not a main cause of malnutrition and that the main contributing factor is behavioral malpractice by mothers who do not know how to appropriately feed or care for their children. In other statements, however, the World Bank acknowledged poverty as a contributing factor towards malnutrition, thus contradicting their previous statements. In addition, the motivations of the World Bank seemed far removed from humanitarian motives, and primarily seemed to be based on raising the economic productivity of poor countries. After conducting the research, it appears to me that the World Bank has a vested interest in investing in malnutrition, but not for the sake of the people dying from it.

Working in a francophone setting further developed my comprehension and speaking abilities. Taking an interactive part in this environment allowed me to further develop my French vocabulary with French-speaking natives as well as provide me valuable personal feedback as to my comfort level and functional capability within the language. While I feel that I have made significant improvement in my French studies, there were times at MSF when it was challenging to follow fast-paced French discussions. I believe I was effective in working on my assignment, and while it did not require fluency in French, feel that having the ability to understand and speak both French and English would further my professional versatility.

Specific to the MSF organization

My knowledge of the MSF organization was increased beyond what I could have learned through research, as a direct result from my interactive experience as an intern within the organization. I learned about the structure and functions of MSF-Switzerland,

as well as how the different teams work on projects, address disagreements between other MSF offices and departments, and what internal problems are being addressed by human resources.

The meetings I attended were an integral part of my interactive experience at the MSF office in Geneva. Not only were the meetings topically informative, but I gained valuable insight on how MSF functions within departments and as an organization.

From the morning meetings I was able to better understand the day-to-day activities of both the field desks and the field staff. Hearing how many minor obstacles field operations face on a daily basis gave me even more respect for those heading and organizing the field missions, and for the field staff in managing through numerous logistical, environmental, and social challenges. One of the aspects of the morning meetings I enjoyed the most was being informed on the major and minor happenings of the field operations. I felt that this type of communication was more informative because there was no “press filter” to determine what news warranted attention. I was informed of even the smallest events, such as a food truck running out of gas or getting a flat tire. I valued this open communication, and will miss it when I am no longer at MSF on a daily basis.

The Thursday meetings also allowed me to better understand the MSF organization. I enjoyed learning about specific MSF projects and their development as well as learning about the new human resources available to MSF staff. One of the most interesting Thursday meetings was when the new multi-media project was being released on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The project was launched internally at the Thursday meeting and was publicly launched that same day. The presentation of the project during

the meeting included information on the goals of the project, press conferences which would be held in the upcoming days, and long-term additions to the project. What I enjoyed the most from the Thursday meetings was the discussion that followed the presentations. The MSF staff would discuss their opinions, offer suggestions, and ask questions of all the presentations to gain a better understanding of the topic. These meetings revealed what a dynamic, pro-active, and welcoming community the MSF staff forms. All perspectives were treated with respect and each person was given time to talk should he or she choose to. I felt that this type of environment fostered personal and professional learning, and was happy to be a part of it.

The Monday meetings gave me specific insight to the Operational Communications Department. From these meetings I learned what the daily, weekly, and monthly schedules of the various Operational Communications Officers consisted of. I found it very interesting to hear what projects they were working on, how many languages the press releases, films, and reports would be translated in to, and what discussions they were having with other MSF offices. In addition, I learned that many of the Operational Communications Officers visit field missions on a regular basis so that they may report on the current issues both internally and publicly. Internally these reports often take form of articles within the MSF Switzerland internal magazine (the TAG.) Publicly they may take the form of press releases or news articles that are put on the MSF Switzerland website. As these meetings were always conducted in French, these meetings also posed an opportunity for me to further my comprehension of the French language in the specific context of the MSF Operational Communications Department. Initially I found it

challenging to follow the discourse of these meetings because of the jargon, but quickly caught on to understand the majority of what was being discussed.

The end-of-the-month Communications Department meeting was an interesting meeting to attend for many reasons. Primarily, because all of the communications teams were together in one room, and secondly because the issues discussed were specific to the functioning of the Communications Department as a whole. This meeting was also conducted in French, again, posing initial difficulties as I was unfamiliar with all of the specific language being used, but also allowing me the opportunity to further my comprehensive listening skills and vocabulary. I felt that this meeting revealed yet another aspect of the MSF organization environment that I could not have experienced without taking on this interactive role.

Finally, my interactions with the MSF staff, and particularly my co-workers in the Operational Communications department provided numerous insights and learning outcomes specific to the MSF professional environment. I am pleased to say that all of my interactions at MSF with the staff were positive, and I had the sense that as an entire community, MSF has very strong inter-personal relationships. Many of my co-workers within the Operational Communications team would check in with me throughout the day, asking if my work was going well, if I would like a coffee from the lounge, or if I would like to join them for lunch. Not only was this significant in my comfort level and inclusion in to the MSF community, it was also was a reflection of the type of working environment MSF fosters. I confirmed through my interactive experience at MSF that I would enjoy being a part of the MSF staff team.

One of the learning outcomes specific to MSF that I was not anticipating was discovering the level of personal, work-related stress that many, if not all, MSF employees face on a daily basis due to the content of the projects they are working on. Immediately upon my arrival to MSF I learned of a MSF phenomenon deemed the 'burnout,' which is a commonly known but infrequently addressed leave of absence for an unspecified amount of time due to psychological exhaustion from the intensive work-stress of the MSF environment. In one of the Thursday meetings a "Stress Audit" had been performed in order to identify areas where the MSF office in Geneva needed to improve working conditions and develop adapted and diversified responses to stressful for staff members. The proposed responses included access to a medical doctor, medical psychologist, and non-medical therapist. These responses were aimed at improving the overall health of MSF workers, and to especially more adequately address 'burnouts' by providing information on the warning signs, preventative measures, and overall understanding of 'burnouts.' In the discussion that followed this presentation, many MSF staff members stated that they were pleased with the new responses, and how the new available health services costs would be partially (if not fully) taken on by the MSF organization. In addition, several staff members expressed the desire for more direct conversation about 'burnouts' so that these psychological leaves may be better understood and addressed in the future.

My impression of the MSF workplace after learning about 'burnouts' is that the MSF office is an extremely intense working environment given both the dedication of the staff and the gravity of the situations being addressed. While human resource teams seem to be working hard to address the work-related stress associated with this particular medical

humanitarian organization, 'burnouts' seem to be such a common occurrence that it warrants reflection as to whether or not I am well suited for such an environment. As I am an extremely relational person by nature and someone with a character of dedication to humanitarian and social justice issues, I can easily see myself becoming completely, if not overly, invested in the programs and work of MSF. While I believe dedication is a clear advantage when working in this type of situation, I believe it would also leave me extremely vulnerable to a 'burnout' and would need to be able to recognize both the symptoms of the 'burnout' and my personal limits so that in the case of employment with MSF I would be effective without 'burning out.'

Professional

Working in the MSF environment held many valuable learning outcomes for me, particularly regarding my professional development. One of the first learning outcomes I encountered was in regards to working in an office environment. My internship at MSF consisted of research and analysis, all of which were conducted on a computer. I quickly came to learn that sitting in front of a computer screen for an entire day began to strain my eyes, giving me headaches that lasted throughout the evening. As I had never had a full-time office position like this before, this was a great professional learning outcome for me. While I valued and enjoyed my time at the MSF office, I found that I prefer to be more active in a work environment than a sedentary one. In order to maximize my productivity and comfort with my desk position at MSF, I learned to take advantage of the lunch break by walking outside, giving my eyes a rest from the computer screen and my body an opportunity to move around in the fresh air. If the weather was not conducive to walking, I opted to sit in the third floor lounge at MSF, where the full-length windows

look on to the tranquil terrace and above the Geneva city streets. This was a welcomed break from the office desk and a great place to have conversations with co-workers over coffee.

One of the other skills I developed was working with fast-paced deadlines. Given the short time frame of my internship at MSF I needed to make sure that all of my work was thorough and completed on time. Both my supervisors and I worked out appropriate deadlines so that the report would be finished by the end of the month, and I needed to make sure that I made every deadline- falling behind was not an option as it would have resulted in an incomplete report. I am pleased to say that I made all of the deadlines we set forth and am content with the completed report.

Another significant area of professional skill development was in my analytical writing. After completing the majority of the analysis in an objective tone of writing, one of my supervisors asked me to include a portion of the analysis that was *non-neutral* and would serve as a platform for debates with MSF's opponents. This request was a challenge for me as I have typically, if not always, written analysis papers from the most objective point possible. To write a subjective paper critiquing the knowledge base, motives, and programming strategies of some of the most active organizations involved in addressing international health issues made me nervous despite having research to support my analysis. I felt that making such statements, however founded, and could potentially endanger my professional credibility in the future should the analysis be seen by other organizations. This was the moment I realized the significance of my assignment; that it was much more than a writing assignment or an analysis- it was an analysis that would be seen and critiqued by all internal MSF staff and held the potential

to be referenced in public debates with the very organizations I was writing about.

Whereas I *wanted* the document to be well written before, now I understood that it *had* to be, for it would be published with my name on it. Through the course of my writing this subjective section of the analysis I attempted to present the data through a non-neutral lens but also in a manner that was non-aggressive. Instead of using the phrase, for example, “Oxfam International completely misunderstands the issues around malnutrition,” I wrote, “Oxfam’s understanding of malnutrition seems to be limited, while their understanding on the broader subject of hunger appears more developed.” By writing in this manner I felt that I was protecting myself from making statements that could threaten my professional future and was also conveying my opinion in a non-aggressive, non-neutral, and accurate manner. After Mr. Verhagen reviewed my work, he said he was pleased with the outcome of the analysis and the manner in which I stated the subjective viewpoints. I too was pleased that I had learned how to complete the work asked of me in a manner which was also within my comfort zone. I feel this was an extremely significant learning outcome for me in regards to my professional development.

RESULTS

My internship period at MSF concluded in two direct professional results. The first clear result from the internship was the completion of the internal report, “The evolution of positions of main actors involved in addressing malnutrition.” The completion of this report served both my academic outcomes as well as provided MSF with a functional research base from which they can reference when entering in to bilateral discussions

with other organizations addressing malnutrition. While the final version is currently being edited, the completed version of the document will be distributed internally to all the MSF staff working on the malnutrition campaign and to all MSF staff in the field.

The second direct result from my internship at MSF was a significant professional offer from my supervisor, Ms. Gremaud, who offered both her recommendation for my application with the MSF-USA internship program, and an additional internship at the MSF-Switzerland office within the Operational Communications Department. This internship would be a full year in length, and would have a fixed remuneration of around 2,000 CH per month. The parameters of this internship would include communications with field teams, writing articles and press release statements, translating from French to English, and other tasks within the Operational Communications Department. Ms. Gremaud specifically expressed her desire to have a native English speaking intern because MSF-Switzerland is attempting to improve in communications in English. She also noted that due to the minimal remuneration of the internship, we could negotiate my hours so that I could work a supplementary job.

I am extremely pleased with both of these results and believe that they reflect strongly on the work, time, and effort I put for during the internship period at MSF. In addition, I feel that both of these results hold great professional significance and will further advance my career aspirations in the humanitarian NGO sector. Particularly in regards to the additional internship offer, I feel that I achieved one of the initial goals I had set for myself in the beginning of the semester; to create opportunities for professional development and possibilities in working in a Swiss humanitarian NGO.

‘NEXT STEPS’

Academic

The coursework of my final academic semester at the University of St. Thomas changed drastically as a result of my semester here in Switzerland. I had initially planned on completing my remaining required courses and filling the remaining credits with another internship.

After taking a great interest in malnutrition, I registered for a nutrition course so that I may better understand the multiple aspects of nutrition and malnutrition. This course specifically focuses on essential nutrients, metabolism, and nutrient deficiencies among other topics. I feel that these are extremely relevant in regards to my research on malnutrition from this semester, and I am looking forward to continuing my learning on the subject of nutrition. If I am given the opportunity during the course to compile a report, I am hoping to particularly study the physiological processes and effects of malnutrition so that I may gain a better understanding of the most effective methods of treating cases of malnutrition.

Additionally, I registered for a biology course that will focus on understanding medical research with specific focus on drugs, devices and complementary therapies. The course includes a section on drug physiology, which I am particularly interested in. The specific learning outcome of the course is to gain the ability to critically evaluate clinical trail literature by the end of the course. I would be particularly interested in reviewing clinical trail literature on Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods such as PlumpyNut or PlumpyDos. Initially it would be interesting to see if these types of therapies are

considered to be drug therapies, and secondly, to be able to personally analyze clinical trial literature on the use of these therapies. I believe this course will assist in my knowledge base in public health and will further my professional development by providing me with another skill set.

I would like to continue my studies in the French language and have looked in to available courses both at my university and partnering schools to see what classes are available to me. I will need to wait on the results from our final French placements to see if there are any such courses and if they fit in to my current schedule for next term. While I believe total immersion is the most effective way for me to become proficient in French, I believe further study in writing, grammar, and translation would benefit my mastery of the language. Continuing my studies in French would also benefit me professionally should I have the opportunity to work with MSF or another francophone organization.

Professional

While I am grateful for Ms. Gremaud's offer for an internship with MSF-Switzerland, I am not certain that the upcoming year would be the most appropriate time for me to step in to the international NGO community. I am currently pursuing a job opportunity in the United States with an organization called Teach For America (TFA) which remains closely integrated with social justice, cultural competency and development issues; however it strays from both the international environment and health sector. I feel that this opportunity will continue to best develop the learning outcomes I have gained through my studies in Switzerland and Paris as well as at the MSF office in Geneva.

In addition to pursuing a teaching position with TFA I am also planning on applying to the MSF-USA internship program in New York for either the summer or fall term. An

opportunity to intern at this MSF office would allow me another interactive experience within MSF and would better enable me to continue my professional development within the organization. As Ms. Gremaud and Mr. Verhagen advised me at the end of my internship with MSF-Switzerland, I will also consider applying for an administrative position on a field mission with MSF so that I may both serve as a volunteer in areas of need, and develop the skills and experience necessary to further understand and implement field programming strategies.

CONCLUSION

I am extremely pleased with the outcomes of my interactive internship at the Médecins Sans Frontières office in Geneva. I believe I gained numerous learning outcomes and developed skill sets that will benefit me in my future academic and professional endeavors. I can not adequately express my gratitude and contentment with my experience at MSF; it was truly an achievement of all the goals I had set forth for the semester and a superb experience in itself.

I am looking forward to further opportunities to continue my knowledge of malnutrition, NGOs, MSF, and public health and to applying the learning outcomes and skills I have developed over the course of this semester in my future academic and professional undertakings.

WORK JOURNAL

Chronology

9 September - SIT Briefing with Thomas Kurmann and Emma Amado from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Switzerland

Location: Paroisse de la Sainte Trinité, Geneva.

Significance: This briefing resulted in my interest in malnutrition and consequently led to the development of my future assignments and internship placement.

13 October – Handed in Literature Review Essay

Significance: I used the Literature Review Essay as a research opportunity to become more familiar with the issues around program responses to malnutrition and specifically to determine if I supported the use of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods as a therapeutic treatment for malnutrition.

22 October – Met with Thomas Kurmann, Director of Communications, MSF-Switzerland

Location: MSF office in Geneva

Significance: I met with Mr. Kurmann for two reasons; one was as a resource for my cultural drop off paper, and the second was to inquire about an internship position at MSF for the interactive research period. During this meeting Mr. Kurmann asked me about what skill sets I possessed, where I may be interested in working within the MSF organization, and if I could send him a CV by the next day so that he could distribute it internally and attempt to find an internship position for me. I was extremely grateful for Mr. Kurmann taking the time to meet with me and for his support in this endeavor. I feel that I would not have gained the same results without his assistance.

23 October – Discussed CV with Dr. Earl Noelte

Location: Ecole Club Migros, Nyon

Significance: Dr. Earl Noelte assisted me in transforming my American resume in to a presentable and professional Swiss-style CV so that it would be ready for distribution within the MSF organization. On this day he looked over my edited CV and gave his approval for me to send it to Mr. Kurmann.

23 October – Sent CV to Mr. Kurmann

Significance: I emailed the updated version of my CV to Mr. Kurmann as an email attachment so that he could distribute it internally to see if any departments had a need for an intern.

23 October – Handed in Cultural Drop-Off Paper

Location: Ecole Club Migros, Nyon

Significance: I used the Cultural Drop-Off Paper as a method to determine what the necessary steps were in interning with a NGO in Swiss civil society, and specifically chose to look in to the MSF organization. This paper provided me with the contacts and the knowledge necessary to pursue an internship with MSF.

23 October – Received and accepted email confirmation from Mr. Kurmann for a MSF internship with the Operational Communications team

Significance: This email turned the possibility and hope of an internship with MSF in to a reality for me. It also reflected on my CV and skill-set, showing that I possessed desirable and functional work skills to work as an interactive part of the MSF organization.

23 October – Met with Dr. Earl Noelte to hand in IRP proposal

Location: Ecole Club Migros, Nyon

Significance: During this meeting with Dr. Earl Noelte I shared with him the proposal for an internship position with MSF and we began discussing the necessary steps for my interactive research project.

3 November – First day of internship at the MSF office in Geneva

Location: MSF office in Geneva

Activities: On my first day at the MSF office I was greeted by one of my supervisors, Ms. Aurélie Gremaud, and then we met my other supervisor, Huub Verhagen and went downstairs to discuss my assignment over coffee. I was nervous as it was my first day and I wanted to make a good impression, but I felt very comfortable with Ms. Gremaud and Mr. Verhagen. I was given my assignment and then Ms. Gremaud gave me a quick tour around the MSF office. After that she showed me to the desk I would be using, gave me the login information for the computer, and let me begin to work. Later that afternoon Ms. Gremaud informed me that the Operational Communications team had meetings every Monday afternoon and that I was welcome to join as well, which I did.

After the afternoon meeting I went upstairs to meet with Mr. Verhagen. He had asked to read my Literature Review Essay and wanted to meet to discuss both that paper and to give me more information on MSF's positioning regarding malnutrition. The feedback Mr. Verhagen had on my essay was very constructive, and I felt fortunate to have an expert provide me with commentary on my writing. I was pleased to receive supportive remarks, as Mr. Verhagen expressed his opinion that I seemed to have a solid foundational knowledge of malnutrition.

The rest of the day was fairly slow, many of the staff were still on a holiday break and had not yet returned to the office, so I was able to sit and work without much interruption for the remainder of the day.

Significance: My first day at the MSF office was a great introduction to the inner workings of the Operational Communications team. On this day I also was able to begin my research and make contacts within the organization as well.

4 November – Meeting with Dr. Earl Noelte

Location: Café Margot, Nyon

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the learning outcomes and project of my interactive research period with MSF.

7 November – Meeting with Dr. Earl Noelte

Location: Café Margot, Nyon

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the refinement of my research assignment at the MSF office.

10 November – Lunch with Ms. Gremaud

Location: Italian restaurant next to MSF Office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the refinement of my research assignment at the MSF office. During this meeting I proposed one idea for a method of refinement, and together we worked out a more manageable assignment.

10 November – Discussion with Mr. Verhagen

Location: MSF office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the refinement of my research assignment at the MSF office as Ms. Gremaud and I had outlined earlier in the afternoon.

In addition, we scheduled meetings for the remainder of the internship period and began setting deadlines for the research and analysis.

18 November – Discussion with Ms. Anne Borrel

Location: SIT office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the IRP format and work journal.

18 November – Discussion with Mr. Verhagen

Location: MSF office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to present the research I had gathered in the previous weeks and have a draft of the presentation of the research.

24 November – Discussion with Mr. Verhagen

Location: MSF office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to begin outlining the analysis of the report.

25 November – Discussion with Mr. Verhagen

Location: MSF office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to present a sample analysis of at least one of the actors for the report.

26 November – Discussion with Mr. Verhagen

Location: MSF office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the final preparations for the analysis and report.

27 November – Discussion with Mr. Verhagen

Location: MSF office, Geneva

Significance: The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the final preparations for the analysis and report.

28 November – Last day of the internship at the MSF office in Geneva

Location: MSF office, Geneva

Significance: On my last day at the MSF office in Geneva I worked mainly on editing the analysis and research and compiling the final document in a comprehensive report.

In addition, Ms. Gremaud, Mr. Verhagen and I went out to lunch as a final conclusion to my internship period with MSF. This was perhaps one of the most significant meetings I had while I was interning at MSF. Both Ms. Gremaud and Mr. Verhagen offered positive feedback on my work and encouragement for my future endeavors. In addition, they identified the next steps and point of entry within MSF for me to pursue in case I should want to obtain a long-term position within the organization. The steps they identified for me included additional experience within MSF (such as interning at MSF-USA,) and gaining field experience (point of access- Admin position, typical age requirement- 25 years.)

In addition, Ms. Gremaud informed me she was looking for a native English-speaking intern for the upcoming year and asked that I inform her of my future plans and availability. She explained the responsibilities, remuneration and timeline of the internship, and I let her know that I appreciated the offer and would consider it. Ms. Gremaud also noted that if I should pursue a position in the MSF-USA internship program that she would be more than willing to be a reference for me.

This final meeting with my supervisors was highly beneficial for my personal and professional learning outcomes. I received positive feedback and information, as well as an offer to continue my work at MSF. Every goal I had set out for my time during the semester and the interactive research period was achieved by this final meeting.

Analysis

Given that the purpose of my presence at MSF was to research and prepare an analytical report, my methods for fulfilling this purpose mainly involved outlining, researching, compiling, and analyzing within the scope of my written report. When I was first given my subject of research, I was given a rough outline of what the final report should include. This outline included a list of twenty actors involved in addressing malnutrition and a time span of eight years (2000-2008.) The initial research subject was, “an overview of the positions of the main actors involved in malnutrition for the past eight years.” The actors were separated in to three categories; implementers (such as MSF or the WFP,) donors (such as the World Bank,) and recipient governments (specifically of Niger, Sudan, Ethiopia, and India.)

Within the first days of receiving this assignment I was overwhelmed by the broad scope of the research. Additionally, as I discussed the project with other MSF staff members I was told that the outline needed to be scaled down for it to be manageable within my one-month time frame. I was a bit discouraged, as I wanted to prove myself as an intern and show that I could rise to the challenge of large tasks, but had the feeling that this one was simply *too* large. I spent the first day researching, hoping I would be able to find some way to manage my assignment as it was given to me. By the end of the day I

had come up with ample amounts of research but the only linking factor between the documents was the subject of malnutrition. I clearly needed to refine the outline.

Within the next two days I began creating a proposal to present to my supervisors as a way to refine the scope of the research. I created an outline of a timeline which would serve as a visual presentation of the programming policies of the main actors involved in addressing malnutrition. I felt it would be an effective way of showing the evolution of positions on programming strategies and would be much more manageable in for analysis purposes. Towards the end of the week I presented my idea to Ms. Gremaud, and while she acknowledged the scope of the research was much too large, had another idea of how to refine the study so that it was still beneficial to the Operational Communications Department. After meeting with Ms. Gremaud I met with Mr. Verhagen to inform him of the changes we had made to the outline and he agreed with both the necessity to scale down the research and the new outline.

The final outline for the report was to study the public discourse on malnutrition from eight main actors (implementers and donor organizations only; the governments we had originally planned on studying proved to have very little available information on malnutrition.) Sources would be primarily press releases, but may also have included other public documents, all found on the respective organization's website. The timeframe was left open as a result of a public archive analysis I performed earlier in my initial research. The purpose of this previous analysis was to determine the time frame of available public documents for each main actor in the study.

Once we had refined the scope of the report, I felt much more comfortable with my assignment and felt I was able to use my time much more effectively than before. With

only four weeks to research, analyze, and prepare a report, losing even a few days was costly.

Research for the report took the first two weeks. The third week was composed mainly of compiling my research in a comprehensive document that would be added to the annex of the report and I spent the fourth and final week writing the analysis. Each week I would check in with one or both of my advisors, sending them my completed work as reference for the meetings via the MSF shared user drive. During these meetings we would discuss any challenges I was running in to or the next step in the project. I felt these meetings were extremely helpful in making sure my time was used efficiently. In addition, I felt that the time my advisors were investing in this project reflected on the significance of the assignment and made me feel like I was contributing useful information to MSF.

External Discussions

My external discussions with Dr. Earl Noelte and Ms. Anne Borrel contributed to my success within the interactive internship at MSF. Specifically their advising on research refinement and IRP structure allowed me to be more effective both within the internship and in communicating my work after the internship.

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ANNEX

Public Archives:

Compiled by Casie Reiss for use by Médecins Sans Frontières
November 2008

NGOs

MSF

Press releases: 1998 – present

ACF

Press releases: (fr) 2006 – present

OXFAM

Press releases: 2005 – present

CARE

Press releases: 2000 – present

News articles: 2000 – present

Annual reports. 1998 – 2007

Save the Children

Press releases: 2005 – present

Annual reports: 2000 – 2007

ICRC

News release: 2004 – present

Annual reports: 2004 – 2007

Terre des Hommes

Press releases: 2007 – present

News: 2007 – present

UN Agencies

WHO

Press releases:

South East Asia region: 1998 – present

Africa region: 1997 – present

Western Pacific region: 1999 - present

News: 2001 – present

Notes to media: 2001 – present

Statements: 2001 – present

WFP

Press releases: Jan 1998 – present

Briefings: Jan 2005 – Dec 2007

‘In brief’ news reports: Apr 2005 – present

‘In depth’ news reports. May 2005 – present

Annual reports: 2000 – 2007

World Health Reports 1995 – 2008

FAO
 Press releases: 1996 – present
 News: 2002 – present

IFAD
 Press releases: 2001 – present

UNICEF
 Press releases: 1999 – present

Donors

World Bank
 Press releases: Sept. 1995 – present
 Speeches: Sept. 1994 – present
 Commentaries: Nov. 2001 – present
 Feature stories: Jan. 1995 – present

US AID
 Press releases: 1996 – present
 Fact sheets: 1996 – present

DIFD
 Press releases: 2004 – present
 News statements: 2004 – present

ECHO
 Press releases: 2000 – present

Governments

Sudan
 Ministry of Health: 2006 Nutrition Policy

Ethiopia
 Ministry of Health
 Press releases: June, Aug 2004
 Nov, Dec 2006
 Jan, Feb 2007
 Sept, Nov 2008

India
 No relevant sources found

Niger
 No relevant sources found

Médecins Sans Frontières:

Interning and working for a humanitarian NGO in Swiss
civil society

Casie Reiss
SIT: Geneva, Fall Term 2008
Sustainable Development and Public Health
Cultural Drop-Off Paper

INTRODUCTION

For my ISP interactive research, I would like to intern with a humanitarian NGO on the subject of malnutrition. More specifically, I would like to work with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) because of their unique stance on the use of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTFs) in cases of acute malnutrition. Therefore, the most important objective for my cultural drop-off experience was to help prepare me to begin my ISP research with MSF.

The central setting of this paper is the Médecins Sans Frontières organization. I used the interviews as a way to confirm whether or not I agree with MSF's stance on the use of RUTFs, and conducted them in a manner that would allow me multiple perspectives on working with a humanitarian NGO, MSF specifically. Finally, I conducted interviews with people currently working for MSF in order to identify the skill set of their interns and to initiate the ISP interactive research.

My learning outcomes for this paper were to: evaluate my own skill set, identify the necessary skills of a MSF intern, and to evaluate how close of a match my skill set is to that of an intern at MSF.

DESCRIPTION

Before conducting interviews for the cultural drop off experience it was important for me to examine both my understanding of the use of RUTFs and my current skill set. The following description begins with these subjects and continues to overview the interviews I conducted.

Knowledge of the RUTF controversy

What I already understand about the use of RUTFs in cases of malnutrition is that MSF's stance is very controversial. Many organizations reserve the use of RUTFs for cases of acute severe malnutrition; however, MSF advocates for the use of RUTFs both in these cases as well as a preventative measure for cases of moderate malnourishment. There is no argument over the effectiveness of RUTFs; rather, the argument is over cost, and the necessity of using these more expensive foods in cases of moderate malnourishment. While many organizations have accepted the use of standard rations in cases of moderate malnourishment, MSF continues to advocate against these foods, arguing they are severely limited and insufficient nutritional treatments because they do not provide all of the necessary nutrients to a growing child. Instead, MSF promotes the use of RUTFs, stating their effectiveness, efficiency, and ability to provide all the necessary nutrients to a young child, as proven statistically in their field operations.

Skill Statement

A crucial step in the cultural drop off exercise was to evaluate my own skill set. I found the best way to do this was to adapt my CV to Swiss standards. This would provide me with the opportunity to have a readily-available CV, which is necessary when pursuing any internship position, and identify the degree to which I would be an effective intern with MSF. I have included a copy of my new CV as an appendix at the end of this paper.

Moreover, I possess extensive leadership experience as well as experience working with a humanitarian non-profit organization on a specific campaign. I have previously held manager, club president and team captain positions in which I have gained both

knowledge and working skills applicable to professional environments. Specific to my campaign experience, I have worked with a non-profit organization for the past three years on their awareness and fundraising campaign for the children and displaced persons of Northern Uganda. My role in their campaign included initiating, publicizing and organizing events at my university; creating and overseeing fundraising events; networking with other local communities, and delegating tasks to other team members.

Interviews

I conducted interviews in multiple settings in order to begin with a wide perspective on RUTFs, Médecins Sans Frontières, and NGOs in general.

The first interview I conducted was with Gina Vea, who works currently with the WHO and has previous experience in both the NGO and private sectors. We spoke on the 15th of October at the WHO office in Geneva over lunch. Our conversation was casual, conducted in English, and lasted for about two hours. There was an even exchange of questions between us, so our talk felt more like a discussion rather than an interview. Ms. Vea provided me valuable information on the differences between working for a governmental organization such as the UN and working for a NGO such as MSF. My motivation for conducting this interview was to gain a perspective from someone who has experience in both the governmental and non-governmental sectors and, and is able to provide me with insight on moving to and working in an international community from the United States.

The second interview I conducted was with Zita Weize-Prinzo, who is works at the WHO in the nutrition department. Ms. Weize-Prinzo and I met on the 17th October at the WHO office in Geneva and had a semi-formal interview on the use of RUTFs. Our

conversation lasted around a quarter of an hour and was conducted in English. This discussion provided me with the WHO's position on the use of RUTFs, which is in contrast to MSF's stance.

The next two interviews I conducted were with people who work for Médecins Sans Frontières; Clementine LaCroix and Thomas Kurmann. I spoke with Ms. LaCroix and Mr. Kurmann, both of whom work in the communications department of MSF, on the 22nd of October. Our discussions were casual, conducted in English, and lasted about one hour each. My purpose in conducting these interviews main purpose in conducting these interviews was to gain information on internship positions at MSF and to initiate contact for the ISP interactive research. The information I gained from this interview pertained to the skills necessary for interning with MSF as well as possibilities for intern placement within the organization.

The final interview I conducted was a phone interview with Caroline Stevan who is a journalist for *Le Temps* and recently wrote an article on the controversy of RUTFs like "Plumpy'Nut." My conversation with Ms. Stevan took place on the 22nd of October, in French, for about 10 minutes. My intent for this interview was to gain a media perspective on the subject of RUTFs, especially with regards to MSF, since they were a primary feature of the article.

INTERPRETATION

I have interpreted the following three conclusions based on the interviews I conducted: 1. There is a clear distinction of opinions on the use of RUTFs in cases of moderate malnourishment; MSF representing one side and most other emergency

organizations such as the WHO representing the other. 2. Interning with a governmental agency such as the WHO requires additional education, direct, interactive research experience, and networking. 3. Interning in the NGO sector does not necessarily require additional education past an undergraduate degree; rather working with an NGO like MSF demands dedication, applicable work skills, and “a bit of luck” (as Mr. Kurmann put it.)

The interviews I conducted on the subject of RUTFs identified two very clear positions in opposition with one another. One of these positions is represented by the MSF organization and advocates for the use of RUTFs in cases of moderate malnutrition, and the other position is represented by the WHO and reserves the use of RUTFs only for cases of acute malnutrition. Since I agree with the approach of using RUTFs in cases of moderate malnourishment, it follows logically that I would pursue an internship with MSF. Additionally, Ms. Veja expressed in my interview with her, there is a greater degree of freedom in NGOs due to their intentional disconnect from governments and government funding. I interpret this to mean that perspectives of governmental organizations are much more limited because any statements or opinions coming from one of these organizations must represent the opinion of all of its member states.

I came to the second and third conclusions through my interviews with Ms. Veja, Ms. LaCroix, and Mr. Kurmann. Ms. Veja identified the necessity of a higher degree when working for a UN agency, and the importance of interning and networking to “get your foot in the door.” In contrast, Ms. LaCroix and Mr. Kurmann revealed that there is no one profile of a MSF intern. Ms. LaCroix said, “it’s not about your education level; its about what you can really do.” From this information, I view UN agencies to be much more

structured, with set standards for education and experience, and NGOs to be much more flexible and accepting of diverse backgrounds and education levels. My interpretation of this information is that there are two paths one can take when pursuing an internship in the humanitarian sector. The path that I am choosing to follow is towards the NGO sector, which will not require me to obtain a Masters degree (although Ms. LaCroix expressed it may be useful in case specializations are desired within an organization) or have previous NGO intern experience. The determining factors of my placement as an intern include unmet needs of a department, my ability to meet those needs with the skills I currently possess, and the availability of time for a manager to assist in realizing learning objectives for my internship.

EVALUATION

One of the first learning outcomes I gained from this experience regarding NGOs was identifying my level of comfort with organizations while conducting interviews. Primarily, the determining factor for my comfort level was language. With organizations such as the WHO I was able to find contacts and hold conversations in English one hundred percent of the time. I felt very comfortable in these setting because English is my mother-tongue. In contrast, while I was establishing contacts within MSF, I found that there were many times when I needed to communicate in French. My phone interview with the journalist from *Le Temps* was conducted entirely in French, which to my surprise, was not a problem at all. These conversations made me more uncomfortable since I am still not entirely confident in my ability to present well thought out and grammatically correct ideas in French. The implication of this as it pertains to my cultural

drop-off is that language is a considerable factor when deciding on an internship setting. My learning outcomes were, more specifically, realizing that 1. I am able to hold conversations in French and 2. I would prefer to be in an environment where I need to speak French so that I may continue to improve my speaking ability. This also confirmed my choice of setting for my internship, as many people at the MSF office communicate in English, though many times I anticipate having to use French.

From the interviews I conducted, I believe that I would be a strong candidate for an internship with MSF. Through my interviews with Ms. LaCroix and Mr. Kurmann, I have found that there are no major skills that I am lacking that would make me *unqualified* to intern with this particular NGO. By contrast, I possess many working skills that would be beneficial to working in an NGO. As Mr. Kurmann and I discussed during our interview, my skill set opens up many possibilities for me within the MSF organization. My particular knowledge of health and science allow for the possibility of more responsibilities within an internship setting as I would not need to learn as much basic knowledge during the course of the training; and my critical reading, writing, and editing skills may be useful in the communications department as well. In addition, minor responsibilities in translating may also be an option for me given my studies of the French language.

CONCLUSION

The consequences of this exercise were extremely important for me as they identified the necessary next steps I need to take with regards to an internship with an NGO like MSF.

One of the first consequences of conducting the interviews for the cultural drop off was having my CV sent out to the MSF campaign office and departments for intern consideration. This outcome has great implications on my further ISP interactive research as it could lead to an internship with MSF.

Another beneficial consequence of this exercise was establishing contacts within my field of study. I have become comfortable emailing and calling experts in order to set up discussions and interviews. One of the greatest things I learned from this experience is that it never hurts to ask people to talk or for help; they usually have a few minutes and are happy to assist if they can. I believe this was a very good lesson to learn, as it has added value for my future academic and professional endeavors.

One thing I have identified through the cultural drop-off that merits my consideration is to continue with the French courses at Ecole Club Migros. An internship with MSF would allow me the possibility to work in a francophone environment, thus further studying the French language would be extremely beneficial. In addition, as I hope to work towards proficiency in French, I believe that these classes are a great opportunity for me.

Overall, this assignment was one of the most beneficial exercises I could have done in preparation for the ISP interactive research project. Through interviews I was able to establish contacts, prepare and distribute my CV to the MSF organization, and gain confidence in conducting interviews. I feel that after assessing my skill set and identifying the skills needed by an intern, I am now prepared to step in to an internship role with MSF.

Quality vs. Quantity:
**An analysis of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods for the treatment of
acute malnutrition in children under five years.**

Casie Reiss
SIT: Geneva, Fall Term 2008
Sustainable Development and Public Health
Literature Review Essay

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS:

CMR	crude mortality rate
CSB	Corn-Soy Blend
CTC	community-based therapeutic care
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HDR	humanitarian daily ration
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MRE	meal ready to eat
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
RUF	ready-to-use food
RUTF	ready-to-use therapeutic food
SAM	severe acute malnourishment
SFP	supplemental feeding program
UN	United Nations
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WSB	Wheat-Soy Blend

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity of food leaves a large number of people vulnerable to food emergencies which require immediate, international attention and assistance. Therapeutic food-treatment programs are used to treat cases of acute malnourishment in emergency situations. The most commonly used of these programs are “dry-feeding” programs which are composed of fortified blended foods such as Corn-Soya Blend (CSB) or Wheat-Soya Blend (WSB), or a combination of cereals, pulses, oil and sugar.^{1,2} In recent years, with the development of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods (RUTFs,) there has been much discussion and debate over the most appropriate form of therapeutic food-treatment programs, and a lack of agreement regarding the scale to which to use each respective treatment.

I have chosen to explore the controversy of RUTFs as it develops in the context of the current food crisis because I am fascinated by the biology and physiology of nutrition and drawn towards the managerial aspect of program development. Thus, it seemed natural to further explore the overlap of these areas in what is therapeutic emergency response to acute malnutrition.

In this paper, I argue that the use of RUTFs as a treatment to acute malnourishment should be increased and should eventually replace the widespread use of general rations.

METHODOLOGY

I. Argument Development

The format of my argument has been refined numerous times since the initial outlining and drafting stages. I began with a general comparison of recovery programs and became immediately aware that the broad scope of my outline would not allow me to effectively evaluate those programs within a twelve-page limit. Thus, I decided to focus on the controversial use of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Foods and evaluate why there is so much discussion surrounding their presence in malnutrition treatment programs. I was further guided after reflecting on our briefing with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). I had asked Ms. Amado a question during her presentation- along the lines of, “does MSF aim to give

¹ United Nations High Commission for Refugees, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme, and World Health Organization. *Food and Nutrition Needs in Emergencies*. November 2002.

² For the purpose of this paper, I will use the term “general ration” to include all variations of SFP foods, dry or wet, with the exclusion of RUTFs.

everyone some food assistance even if it means no one receives enough, or does MSF focus instead on giving an adequate amount of food assistance to a selected population even if it means that others will go without?" In response to this question, she explained that this was a question of quality vs. quantity, and MSF always focuses on quality. This question became the central exploration of my paper, and I began to research literature to determine if a "quality approach" like MSF's use of RUTFs is an appropriate response to acute cases of childhood malnourishment.

II. Instruments for Evaluation

In regards to the use of RUTFs as a therapeutic treatment for acute childhood malnutrition, the following criteria will be evaluated in accordance to the "Evaluation Criteria" handout from Dorothy Prezza of FOSIT:

1. *Relevance*: To what extent does the project meets local demonstrated and priority needs?
2. *Impact*: What is the measure of effect of the project on its wider environment?
3. *Effectiveness*: To what extent does the project deliver anticipated benefits and contribute to the achievement of the results and objectives?
4. *Efficiency*: Are resources and time well managed?
5. *Sustainability*: Will the benefits continue to flow after external sustain has ended (including economic, environmental, socio-cultural, etc.)?³

Impact will be evaluated with respect to indicators from Goal 1, Target 1.C of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).⁴ These include prevalence of underweight children under-five years of age (indicator 1.8) and proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption (indicator 1.9).⁵

Effectiveness will be evaluated with respect to indicators of weight gain, weight-to-height ratios, and recovery rates.

III. Learning Objectives

³ Prezza, Dorothy. "Evaluation Criteria." FOSIT. Hotel Pestalozzi Lugano. 24 Sept. 2008.

⁴ Goal 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Target 1.C: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

⁵ United Nations. "Official list of MDG indicators." Effective 15 January 2008.

The framework of my learning, which has been formulated from briefings, required readings, and outside research, I have briefly outlined below.

Food Security

Zaryab Iqbal states, “The security of people is related to their quality of life and, therefore, the threats to their security include a number of social and economic issues.”⁶ One of these issues he identifies to be access to food. Food security therefore, “exists when all people, at all times, have physical social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”⁷

The WFP identifies four parts to food security: *availability* (the supply of food in an area); *access* (a household’s ability to obtain that food); *utilization* (a person’s ability to select, take-in and absorb the nutrients in the food); and *vulnerability* (the physical, environmental, economic, social and health risks that may affect availability, access and use).⁸

Many factors influence the state of global food security and people’s access to food. These include (but are not limited to): depletion of food stocks and increases in prices, changing climatic conditions; rise in oil, energy, and transportation costs, supply and demand imbalance, production of biofuels, low agricultural production in developing countries, and multilateral trade rules.⁹ David Nabara stated that of all these factors, the primary determinant in the malnutrition of a child is poverty- for when the cost of food increase, poverty increases, and as a direct result, the prevalence of malnutrition increases.¹⁰ When any of these factors result in food insecurity, the risk of a resulting food emergency is a likely, and often imminent, threat.

⁶ Zaryab, Iqbal. "Health and Human Security: The Public Health Impact of Violent Conflict." International Studies Quarterly 50 (2006): 631-49.

⁷ FAO. “Trade reforms and food security- conceptualizing the linkages.” Paragraph 2.2. 2003

⁸ World Food Programme. World Hunger Series 2007: Hunger and Health. UK, USA: Earthscan, 2007.

⁹ United Nations. Addressing the Global Food Crisis: Key trade, investment and commodity policies in ensuring sustainable food security and alleviating poverty. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. 3-5 June 2008, Rome.

¹⁰ Nabara, David. "The Activities of the UN Task Force on the Global Food Crisis." United Nations. United Nations Office, Geneva. 9 Oct. 2008.

Emergencies

In SIT briefings and required readings multiple definitions of “emergency” have been presented to us and more are found through outside research. The World Food Programme (WFP) proposed this updated version of the definition of “emergencies” in 2005:

Urgent situations in which there is clear evidence that an event or series of events has occurred which causes human suffering or imminently threatens human lives or livelihoods and which the government concerned has not the means to remedy; and it is a demonstrably abnormal event or series of events which produces dislocation in the life of a community on an exceptional scale.¹¹

(This definition is fairly standard among governmental and non-governmental organizations.) More simply stated, emergencies are marked by, “an acute decrease in health” and are identifiable in graphical form as Frédéric from Médecins du Monde demonstrated in Paris. His visual representation depicted the linear progression of a community’s health (baseline) and sudden, sharp decrease from that baseline (emergency.) The goal of recovery programs is to return the population’s health level to the state it was at prior to the onset of the emergency.¹²

Malnutrition

Malnutrition represents a specific emergency caused by some form of food insecurity. Emma Amado from Médecins Sans Frontières presented a dual-part definition for malnutrition, identifying it as “a disease that can be fought against.”¹³ The WFP more specifically defines malnutrition to be, “a physical condition in which people experience either nutritional deficiencies (undernutrition) or an excess of certain nutrients (overnutrition).” The WFP also identifies and defines different types of malnutrition including: acute malnutrition (which further breaks down in to stages of severe,

¹¹ World Food Programme. "Definition of Emergencies." World Executive Board. First Regular Session. Policy Issues: Agenda item 4. Jan.-Feb. 2005, Rome.

¹² Frédéric. "Health and Complex Emergencies." Médecins du Monde. Médecins du Monde Office, Paris. 03 Sept. 2008.

¹³ Amado, Emma. "Malnutrition: Our Activities in Niger." Médecins Sans Frontières. Paroisse de la Sainte Trinité, Geneva. 9 Sept. 2008.

moderate, and global acute malnutrition,) and protein-energy malnutrition. Physical indicators of malnutrition include stunting (calculated by comparing the height-for-age of a child with a reference population of well-nourished and healthy children,) and wasting (comparison of weight-for-height).¹⁴ In addition to these visible effects, malnutrition also weakens immunological resistance and increases risks of dying from diseases such as pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, measles, and AIDS.¹⁵

ARGUMENT: Ready-to-Use Therapeutic-Foods (RUTFs)

Description and Purpose

A RUTF is a nutrient-dense treatment for acute malnutrition that contains fortified milk powder, vegetable oil, sugar, peanut butter, and powdered vitamins and minerals.¹⁶ RUTFs come in various forms, including pastes, high-energy/protein biscuits, humanitarian daily rations (HDRs,) and meals ready to eat (MREs.) The use of this type of treatment is typically reserved for “exceptional circumstances” when no other foods or cooking facilities are available in an immediate response at the onset of an emergency.¹⁷

Case Study: Malawi

It is estimated that 48 percent of Malawi’s 2.5 million children under-5 years are chronically undernourished and 22 percent are acutely malnourished. In Malawi, severe acute malnourishment (SAM) is the most common reason for pediatric hospital admission.

First implemented in Malawi in 2002, community-based therapeutic care (CTC) is one of the new SAM treatment programs which allows children to be treated at home with the use of RUTFs rather than in a hospital setting. The goal of this program is “to start discharging at a much earlier stage so that treatment can be completed in the community, thereby reducing overcrowding and subsequent cross-infection rates and reducing the cost to caregivers.”

¹⁴ World Food Programme. *World Hunger Series 2007: Hunger and Health*. UK, USA: Earthscan, 2007.

¹⁵ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Starved For Attention: Wake up to the crisis of malnutrition*. June 2008.

¹⁶ Manary, Mark J. “Local production and provision of ready-to-use therapeutic food for the treatment of severe childhood malnutrition.” November 2005.

¹⁷ United Nations High Commission for Refugees, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme, and World Health Organization. *Food and Nutrition Needs in Emergencies*. November 2002.

The results of the CTC program in Malawi support the use of RUTFs as a treatment for acute malnutrition. The recovery rate of the program was 75%; much higher than in standard therapeutic feeding programs. In a similar study, adult patients with symptomatic HIV, the use of energy-dense RUTFs of 500g over three months “increased the weight and strength of many of the participants to a far greater extent than in previous trials that used less energy-dense blended foods.” The results were so favorable, in fact, that “78 percent became strong enough to walk to medical services at the local facility.”¹⁸

Relevance

In a malnutrition emergency, the primary need of the population is to improve nutritional status. More specifically, there is a need for a significant increase in caloric intake and the addition of lacking micronutrients.

RUTFs are relevant in meeting the needs of malnourished individuals. Without any other supplemental foods, a RUTF contains all 40 essential nutrients that a malnourished child needs “to reverse nutrient deficiencies and gain weight.”¹⁹

In contrast, fortified general rations rarely contain all the necessary nutrients a malnourished child needs. In addition, the cereal and soy components of these rations have anti-nutritive factors that reduce the utility of fortification because they impede the absorption of nutrients.²⁰

Impact

The impact of RUTFs on the MDG1, Target 1C is a complicated issue. As of now, RUTFs are primarily being used in only the most extreme cases of malnutrition, so their impact on the broader population that suffers from hunger is unknown, since many cases are not considered severe enough to warrant the use of RUTFs. On the other hand, the impact of RUTFs on populations vulnerable to food insecurities is notable. This is best shown in Niger, where MSF used RUTFs to treat over 60,000 severely malnourished children in CTC programs similar to those used in Malawi. After the establishment of this program, “the seasonal peak of admissions of severe cases observed every year...did not

¹⁸ All data regarding this case study was found at: Valid International. “From Research to Action.” 2007. Available in World Hunger Series 2007: Hunger and Health, WFP, p. 114. UK, USA: Earthscan, 2007.

¹⁹ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Starved For Attention: wake up to the crisis of malnutrition*. June 2008.

²⁰ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Food is not enough: without essential nutrients millions of children will die*. 2008.

occur,” suggesting that treatment with RUTFs has a significant, positive impact and “can prevent the development of severe malnutrition in a large cohort of moderately malnourished children.”²¹

Effectiveness

The purpose of RUTFs is to effectively and efficiently treat cases of malnourishment. The desired results of these programs include an increase in nutritional health of patients marked by weight gain, increased weight-height ratio; and an increase in nutritional health of the population, marked by an increase in cure rate.

There is very little controversy that RUTFs are effective. When used by MSF in Niger, recorded weight gain (5.28 g/kg/day amongst the moderately malnourished) was markedly higher with the use of RUTFs than what is generally obtained by using general rations (generally below 3 g/kg/day). Cure rates of moderately malnourished children were at 92.5% with the use of RUTFs and 81.3% in those who were severely malnourished.²² (No data was available for weight-height ratios.)

Efficiency

One of the greatest advantages of using RUTFs in CTC programs is their time efficiency. As their name implies, RUTFs require no preparation prior to consumption and are packaged in individual dosages thus eliminating the possibility of under or over dosage. (General rations are easily under and over dosed because they need to be prepared with a specific amount of water for proper consumption.) Both of these aspects of the RUTF itself save time and resources that are vital in emergency situations.²³

During food emergencies, mothers are often times required to leave their families for extended periods of time in order to travel with their severely malnourished child to the nearest town to seek nutritional treatment. Valid International notes that “given the high costs to the family of a prolonged maternal absence, severely malnourished children arrive very late, if at all, at crowded inpatient units.” Consequently, delayed arrival is associated with an increase in health complications and inpatient mortality rates above 25

²¹ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Starved For Attention: wake up to the crisis of malnutrition*. June 2008.

²² Médecins Sans Frontières. *Food is not enough: without essential nutrients millions of children will die*. 2008.

²³ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Food is not enough: without essential nutrients millions of children will die*. 2008.

percent.²⁴ With the introduction of RUTFs in CTC programs, mothers are able to stay with their families and treat their malnourished child at home. Hospitals are less crowded, and are able to see more patients who may not be able to receive treatment outside of a hospital setting.

Other aspects of RUTFs that make them an efficient treatment for malnourishment include their long shelf life (increases temporal flexibility of transport and storage), packaging (lighter and less voluminous than general ration ingredients, therefore easier to transport) and composition (no water, thus resistant to bacterial contamination; extremely nutrient dense, therefore extremely effective.)²⁵

Sustainability

The sustainability of RUTFs is often questioned due to the high cost of ingredients. RUTFs contain fortified milk powder, making them a more effective tool in treating acute cases of malnourishment than general rations; however powdered milk is more expensive than general ration ingredients and comprises 42% of the ingredient cost of RUTFs. In addition, the price of milk has dramatically increased in the past year, directly raising the cost of RUTFs.²⁶ General rations are typically less expensive than RUTFs because general rations do not include milk powder; however, research indicates “while the cost of RUTF may not be substantially less than foods used in center-based therapy, the overall cost of the therapeutic feeding endeavor may well be.”²⁷ This hypothesis is supported by a case study in Malawi where patients with HIV received RUTFs as nutritional rehabilitation and the cost per recovery was “75-90 percent cheaper than equivalent blended food programs.”²⁸ These results indicate that the use of RUTFs is in actuality, more of a sustainable solution than general ration programs.

²⁴ Valid International. “From Research to Action.” 2007. Available in World Hunger Series 2007: Hunger and Health, WFP, p. 114. UK, USA: Earthscan, 2007.

²⁵ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Starved For Attention: wake up to the crisis of malnutrition*. June 2008.

²⁶ Jarrett, Steve. “RUTF (Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods): Addressing the situation of children in Africa with severe acute malnutrition.” UNICEF. October 2007.

²⁷ Manary, Mark J. “Local production and provision of ready-to-use therapeutic food for the treatment of severe childhood malnutrition.” November 2005.

²⁸ Valid International. “From Research to Action.” 2007. Available in World Hunger Series 2007: Hunger and Health, WFP, p. 114. UK, USA: Earthscan, 2007.

Interpretation and Analysis

I find the evaluation of the use of RUTFs compelling; regardless of the degree of malnutrition to which they are responding to, but especially in regards to acute cases. In comparison to general rations, the evidence of the impact and effectiveness of RUTFs is overwhelming and I am led to believe that these treatments are widely underused and underappreciated.

During my research process one significant contradiction I came across was regarding the nutritional adequacies of general rations. While the joint publication by the WHO, WFO, UNICEF, and UHNCR states, “the requirements of a population can be readily satisfied with mixtures of proteins of plant origin (e.g. cereals and legumes.)”²⁹ MSF on the other hand, insists that such rations “rarely include all of [the nutrients] needed by a malnourished child, and the levels of fortification are often inadequate or inappropriate. In addition, the cereal and soy components have antinutrient factors that reduce the utility of fortification, as they make absorption of nutrients difficult.”³⁰ This statement by MSF, if true, mean that current therapeutic feeding programs are severely inadequate and are not effectively addressing the emergency of malnourishment. For any organization with current general ration programs to acknowledge this would call in to question the efficiency of that organization; possibly threatening funding of that organization. Without funding, none of the organizations programs would be able to function.

Something I found interesting in my research was the issue of water as it pertains to therapeutic foods. In articles advocating for the use of RUTFs one shortcoming of general rations that was often identified was the general ration’s dependence on water. This dependence limits the effectiveness of general rations, since access to clean water is not always available and bacterial contamination or under/over diluting the general ration may easily occur, decreasing the nutritional value of the ration. What I found particularly noteworthy was that in all of my research on the advantages and disadvantages of RUTFs only Mark Manary’s technical background paper acknowledged the necessity of water in supplement to RUTFs. As this is the case, the same issues and concerns regarding the

²⁹ United Nations High Commission for Refugees, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme, and World Health Organization. *Food and Nutrition Needs in Emergencies*. November 2002.

³⁰ Médecins Sans Frontières. *Food is not enough: without essential nutrients millions of children will die*. 2008.

dependence on water of the general rations also apply to RUTFs with the exception of dilution.

EVALUATION

Recommendation

Based off briefings, required readings, and outside research, I would recommend that the use of RUTFs in response to acute cases of malnourishment be drastically increased.

Outcomes

The most significant outcome of my research was familiarizing myself with the language of surrounding human and food security, emergency, nutrition, and international response programs. I feel that the research I conducted during the course of this essay vastly increased my knowledge and vocabulary regarding these subjects and has allowed me to more fully enter in to discussions here in Geneva.

Future Research

As efficiency, specifically cost efficiency, is the main deterrent from using RUTFs, I was interested to research proposed alternative solutions to offset the cost of this type of therapeutic food (not including general rations).

One compelling proposal is the local manufacturing of the paste form of RUTFs in developing nations such as Malawi. Advantages of this process include: decreased transport costs, timelier accessibility, and the possibility to stimulate local economies and production through local purchases of RUTF ingredients.³¹

Another option to attempt to lower the cost of RUTFs is to substitute the fortified milk powder for another substance of similar nutritional value. This is virtually what general rations are trying to accomplish, however, their use of only plant based products limits the nutritional value of RUTFs as discussed previously. I would conclude from the limited research available that more studies and trials need to be conducted in order to determine if there are other, more cost-effective formulas of RUTFs that can be manufactured with similar results and without milk products.

³¹ Manary, Mark J. "Local production and provision of ready-to-use therapeutic food for the treatment of severe childhood malnutrition." November 2005.

Additionally, I would be very interested to research the physiological effects of malnutrition; particularly in regards to wasting, stunting, *kwashiorkor*, and micro-nutrient deficiencies. I would like to better understand the cause and progression of these physical manifestations of malnutrition so that I can in turn better understand what affects therapeutic programs and foods will have on the human body.

Next Steps

From this point, I would like to continue researching and familiarizing myself with language, issues, ideas, and controversies surrounding malnutrition; recovery programs, and international organizations responding to food emergencies. I would also like to continue to refine my scope of focus so that I may begin to formulate an appropriate ISP project.

CONCLUSION

After evaluating the use of RUTFs as a therapeutic response to acute malnourishment, I believe the subsequent research has reaffirmed my thesis that RUTFs are underused and should be increased in CTC programs. After comparing the outcomes of RUTFs in the field with those of general rations, I am even further convinced that RUTFs are a more adequate response to acute and moderate malnourishment and that steps should be taken by governmental and non-governmental recovery organizations to replace general ration programs with CTC and RUTF programs when appropriate.

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