

Role of Cuddles Foundation in Addressing Malnutrition in Paediatric Oncology Patients in India

Anju Morarka¹, Purnota Bahl¹, Sripriya Venkiteswaran²

¹Cuddles Foundation, Research, Knowledge Management and Impact, Mumbai, India

²Cuddles Foundation, Cuddles Institute of Clinical Nutrition (CICN), Mumbai, India



Background & Aim

Malnutrition at diagnosis or/and during treatment in paediatric oncology patients can result in poor outcomes and survival. Children from a lower socioeconomic group, in particular, are at a higher risk of being malnourished. This study highlights the model which Cuddles Foundation (CF) uses to provide nutritional support to such children in government hospitals throughout India.

Methods

In collaboration with government hospitals, CF first places specially trained nutritionists in the paediatric oncology departments and then onboards children who are in need of nutrition support. The CF nutritionist assesses the clinical condition and nutritional status of the patient, designs a nutrition intervention program, monitors progress and supports the family through parent support meetings. Nutrition aid if required, is provided in the form of ration bundles, nutritional supplements, nutritious snacks and hot meals. Patient data is maintained in the internal CF FoodHeals™ App, which enables the tracking of nutritional status and ensures uniformity of care across the various CF centres.

Figure 1

The FoodHeals™ Approach followed by CF nutritionists to create an individualised nutrition plan for children with cancer

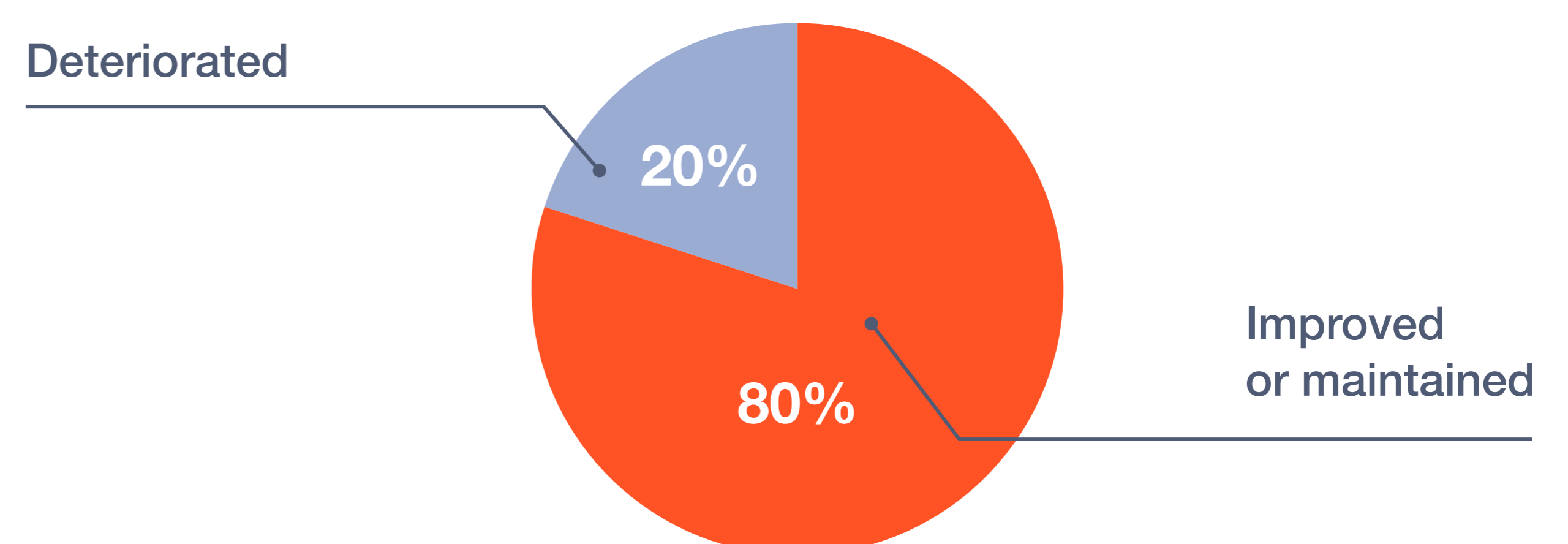
- 1 Assess:** We first assess and screen the nutritional status of every child seeking cancer treatment in our partner hospitals.
- 2 Evaluate:** We evaluate side effects that may negatively impact the child's nutritional status.
- 3 Prescribe:** We finalise the right nutrition therapy and prescribe a customised diet plan for the child.
- 4 Provide:** We aid and support the child and family by providing nutritional supplements, hot meals, in-meals, eggs, bananas and monthly ration bundles for a family of four.
- 5 Monitor:** We continuously monitor the child's nutritional status and reassess plans, if required.
- 6 Support:** We also support patient families with the knowledge to make healthier food choices by organising parent support group meetings, videos and educational talks.

Results

Over the last 5 years, CF nutritionists have provided over 630,000 counsels. In the year 2020-2021, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, CF provided 101,805 counsels including teleconsults to 6,123 patients. Nutrition supplements worth USD 218,623, ration bundles worth USD 368,139, nutritious snacks worth USD 62,616 and hot meals worth USD 15,886 were distributed to the recipients.

Figure 2A

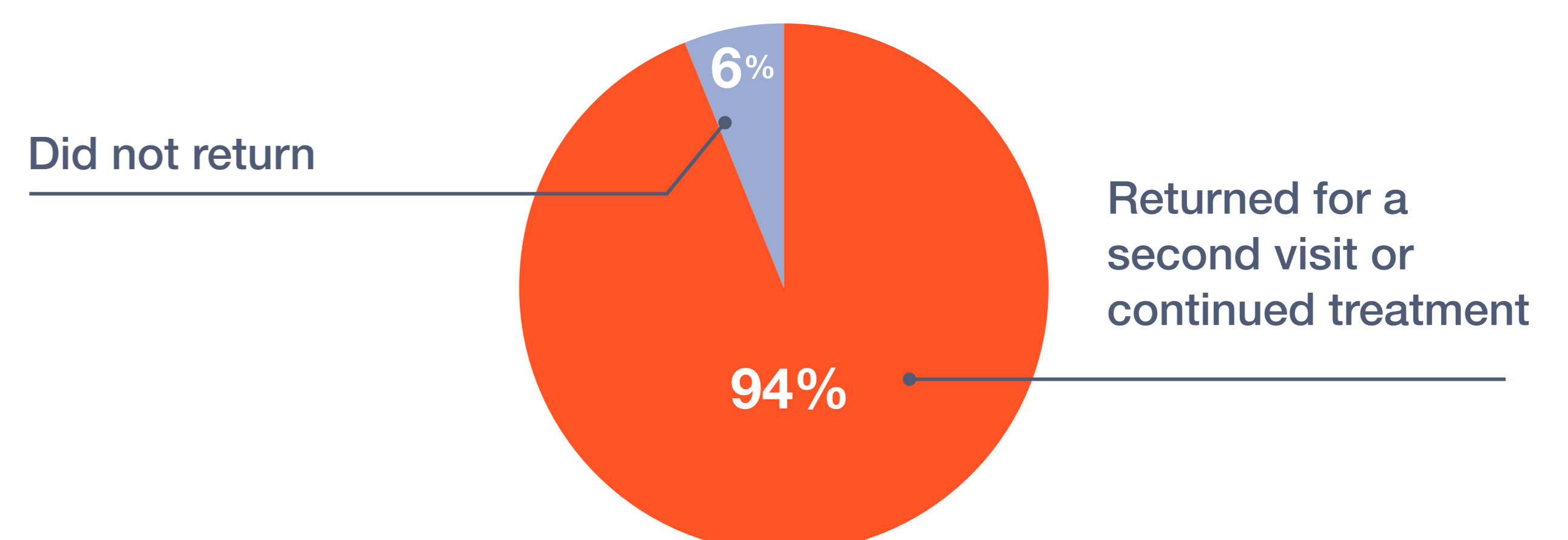
Impact of Cuddles Foundation Program - Nutritional status of counselled patients



Using the FoodHeals™ app, CF was able to assess that 80% of patients improved or maintained their nutritional status during treatment and 94% of patients counselled, returned for a second visit or continued treatment.

Figure 2B

Impact of Cuddles Foundation Program - Percentage of Counselled Patients



Conclusion

Children were able to maintain or improve their nutritional status with the support from Cuddles Foundation. This study demonstrates that the Cuddles Foundation model is very effective in providing essential nutrition support and counselling to help address malnutrition in children during cancer treatment.