

The story of Simoes

Although it is early morning, the hospital grounds are already bustling with activity. It is National Health Week in Mozambique; many mothers have turned up for a medical check-up for their kids. Mobile brigades are also active during health week, visiting mothers and children that live too remote to be able to turn up. Carrying loads of vaccines, vitamin A and deworm pills, volunteers join nurses on their ways to even the remotest villages. Whether on foot, by bike or by canoe, they will ensure they reach each and every child. Apart from vaccination and administering vitamins and pills the nurses will also check children on malnutrition.

During her round in a remote village, the nurse instantly found Simoes to be seriously ill. Weakened by acute malnutrition he had moreover contracted pneumonia. Instant treatment being of vital importance, she immediately commissioned him to hospital. Simoes has been through an awful lot, despite being only 15 months old. One month ago his mother died, to be followed by his father one week ago. Simoes had been lacking care during this period, but fortunately his aunt Regina assumed loving care of the child. She immediately turned up at the hospital after the check-up and the child's instant admission on grounds of his critical condition.

Nurse and malnutrition specialist Hilario Mateus examines Simoes. He is emaciated. His weight, only 5.5 kilos, should have been at least 3 more. The band used to establish whether a child is undernourished ends up deep in the red around his thin upper arm. Fortunately however, he turns out HIV-negative. He is treated for malaria, pneumonia and, obviously, malnutrition and is given antibiotics, anti-malaria treatment, therapeutic milk and Plumpy'Nut® (therapeutic peanut paste).

There is a drip in his hand to ensure that his medicines are administered properly and evenly and he is expected to remain in hospital for at least 15 days. Nurse Hilario gives Simoes his first sachet of Plumpy'Nut®. Initially he is wondering at the little red-and-white bag, but as soon as he has tasted his first mouthful it is just as if life is flowing back into his tiny body. Grabbing fervently for the bag, he takes little mouthfuls of Plumpy'Nut®. Not much later, nurse Guida Cabral prepares the therapeutic milk. She has put on a mouth cap and disinfected her hands. Next, Simoes is spoon-fed the therapeutic milk, which is obviously doing him very well. After this meal he drops off into a profound sleep.



A few days later Simoes is clearly doing much better. Released from fever, the look in his eyes has improved. He devours his bag of Plumpy'Nut®. His aunt has joined the hospital instruction session organised by the nurses. They tell about the huge importance of varied meals. Cassava porridge may for instance be mixed with eggs, peanuts and various vegetable leaves to improve its nutritious quality and ensure that it contains all vitamins and minerals required for a child's healthy growth.