

Going Home with a Tube: The Changing Profile of a Multidisciplinary Home Enteral Nutrition (HEN) Program

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Northern Health

Introduction

- Northern Health (NH) speech pathology and dietetics teams support infants and families going home with nasogastric tubes (NGT) on the Home Enteral Nutrition (HEN) program.
- Complex feeding difficulties are prevalent in hospitalised infants, and earlier discharge with an NGT is more common.¹⁻³
- Emerging evidence suggests that HEN programs can reduce stress, improve QOL, reduce LOS, and reduce healthcare costs.⁴⁻⁶
- Successful weaning from NGT is dependent on responsive multidisciplinary support for parents and infants.
- Over past 5 years demand for the NH program has increased, prompting a review of the care provided to this high risk cohort.

Our research questions

- What is the profile of patients accessing our HEN program?
- What factors are associated for successful tube weaning?

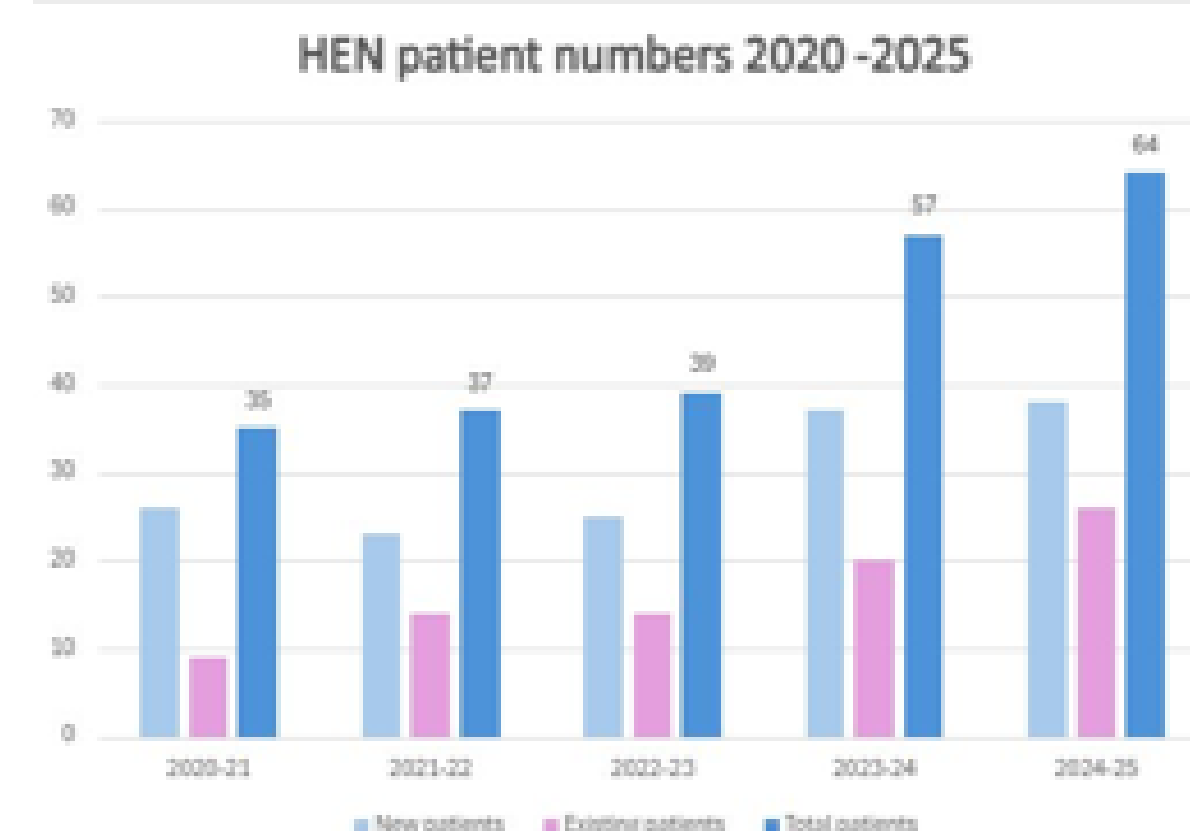
Methods

Ethics approval was granted for a retrospective audit of infants accessing the HEN program (with speech pathology & dietetic follow-up), between July 2024 – June 2025. De-identified data was collected and analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results

Forty-two (n=42) infants met the criteria for this audit

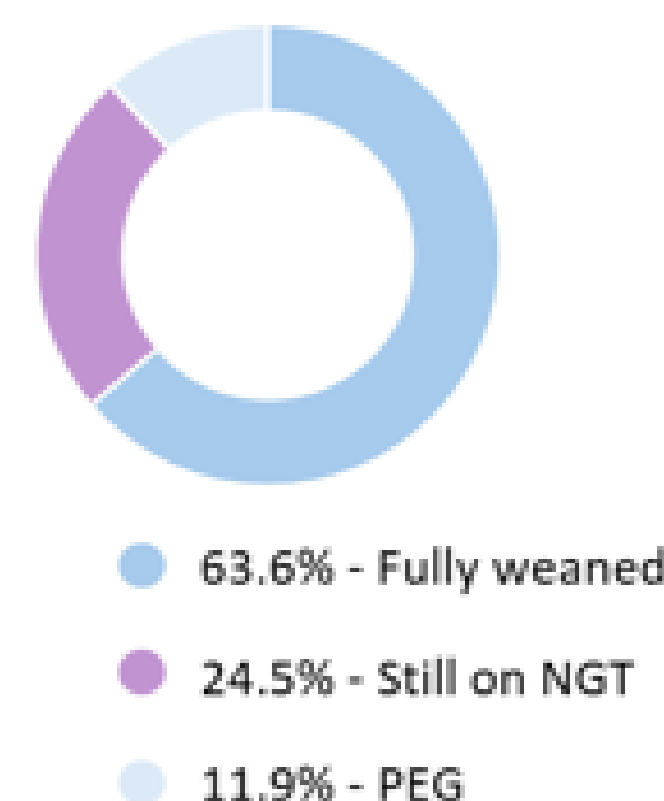
01 More infants are going home with a tube



+83%
Growth in HEN caseload
35 infants (2020-21) → 64 (2024-25)

71%
Referrals were from NH.
79% from the Neonatal Unit (NNU) and 21% from Child & Adolescent Health Unit (CAHU)

03 Tube weaning outcomes are heterogeneous



Days to tube wean

155 days
Median time to full oral feeding (~5 months)

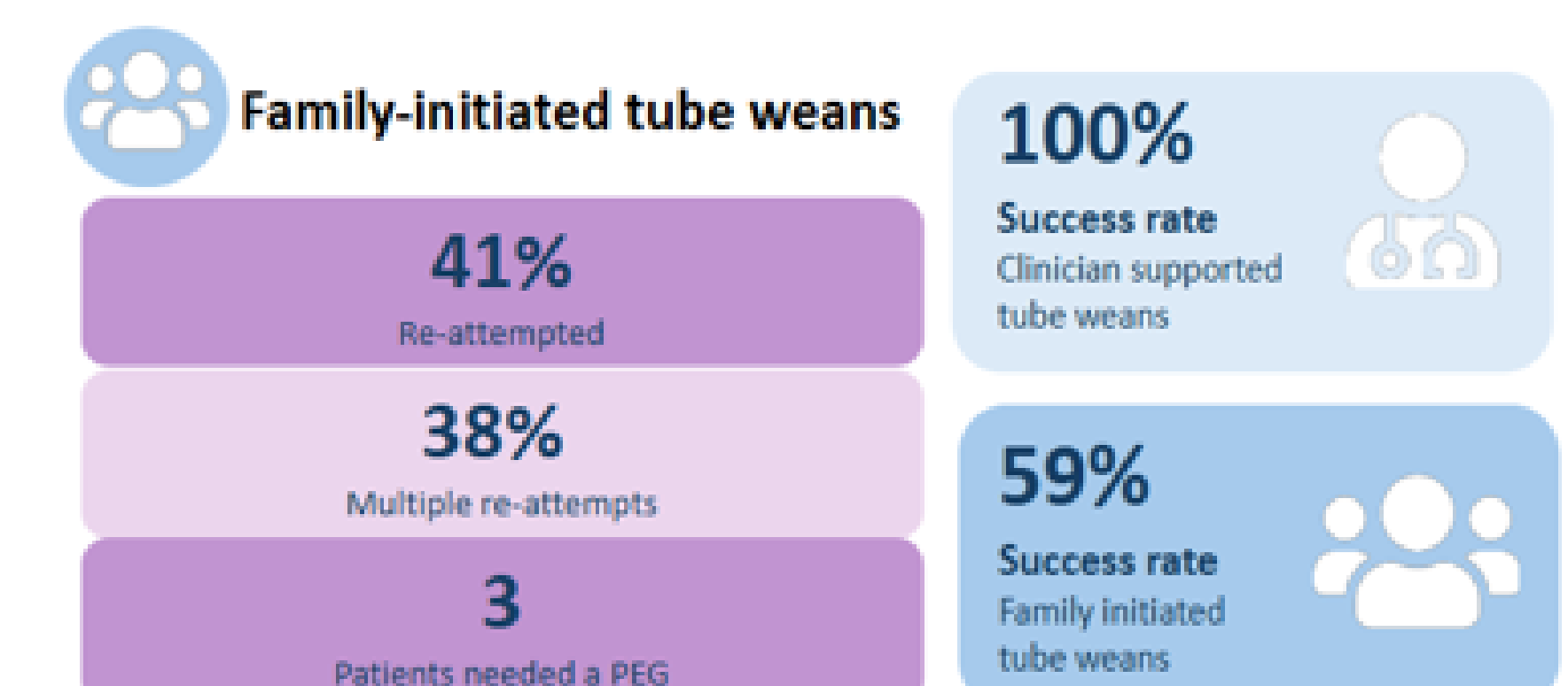
20%
of infants weaned within the first month

02 Two in five HEN discharges are term infants

GA (wks)	n (%)	Mean GA (wks)	Mean BW (g)	PMA at HEN initiation (wks)
≤ 28	9 (22.0)	25.8	653	52
29–33	7 (17.1)	31.9	1293	45
34–36	9 (22.0)	35.1	2522	49
37–40	16 (39.0)	38.9	3710	49
All	41	34.0	2295	49

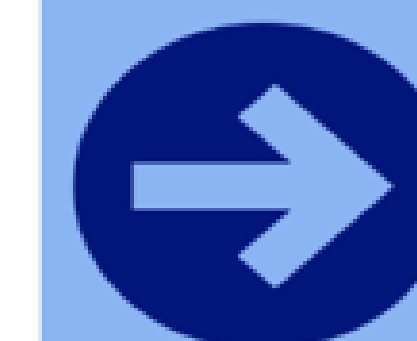
Common diagnoses across the cohort were respiratory (57%), cardiac (40.5%) and neurological (37.5%). Most infants presented with a combination of diagnoses.

04 Families often initiate tube weaning



Conclusion

- The NH HEN caseload is growing**
83% growth in infants discharged home with tubes between 2024-2025 is consistent with national and international trends
- Heterogeneous patient profile**
Many of our HEN cohort were term infants, which differs from the focus on preterm infants in the literature
- Variability in time to wean**
50% of infants weaned from tubes in 155 days, higher than published data impacted by medical complexity & % oral feeds pre discharge
- Families initiate many tube weans**
With variable success, a larger sample needed to determine significance of this finding



Next Steps:
Qualitative study explore family perspectives and preferences on tube weaning

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