

Community Health Workers: Needed Resource Globally

Deborah A. Fortune, *North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC*

Miguel A. Perez, *California State University, Fresno, CA*

The use of community health workers (CHW) is not a new concept; they have been involved in organization programs and national health care systems for over 60 years (Singh, n.d.). However, they are still very relevant for addressing the health needs and concerns of their communities. CHWs have played major roles in providing health services in rural areas in low income countries, thus, they have been credited for the success of several community-based interventions across the globe. The roles of CHW are diverse, ranging from providing health services to sharing health information and implementing health education/promotion interventions. Currently, their roles have evolved to being used to help bridge the health equity and disparities gap in high income countries due in part of their understanding and connection to their communities.

As noted by Olaniran, Smith, Unkels, Bar-Zeev and Van den Broek (2017), there is vast diversity in the definition and roles of community health worker. For this special issue of the *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion*, we offer the American Public Health Association's definition as a working framework, which states that a CHW is "frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served" (APHA, 2018, para 2). CHW are referred to by many names such as *promotores*, lay health workers, traditional birth attendants, and health extenders, which will be highlighted in articles in this special issue. Although CHW is the umbrella term, the various names tend to reflect the specific role, setting, or cultural aspect of the community health worker.

This special issue of the *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion* focuses on community health workers in high, middle, and limited/low income countries. The goal of the special issue is to provide an interdisciplinary perspective on a variety of topics related to the use and role of community health workers for addressing the need for health services and areas of health disparities in various settings globally. It is expected these articles will illuminate the importance of community health workers in providing access and coverage of health services and health education across the globe, particularly, low income countries.

Deborah A. Fortune is an Associate Professor in the Department of Public Health Education at North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC. **Miguel A. Perez** is a Professor and Internship Coordinator in the Department of Public Health at California State University, Fresno, CA. Please send author correspondence to dfortune@nccu.edu

The first article is a perspective on the essential roles of *promotores de salud* (Spanish term for community health workers) along the United States-Mexico border (Forster-Cox, Torres, and Adams, 2018). Best practices on the various roles of *promotores de salud* as identified by U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission are shared in this article. The next article describes a research project designed to test the feasibility of a peer-driven model, culturally specific approach, to address cervical cancer among women in Punjab, India. This pilot study trained community women to take on the role of CHWs in order to mobilize women in their social networks take the necessary action to reduce the risk of developing cervical cancer (Chhabra, Rivera, Sharma, Ghosh, & Bauman, 2018).

Fiori and colleagues (2018) describes the experience of a community based organization's development of a community health worker model within ambulatory patient centered medical home sites in collaboration with an academic medical center. In addition, this article provides a brief history and definition of CHW. The next research article provides the findings from the evaluation of lay health worker program. Wubben, Peden, and Jeffrey (2018) evaluated a health intervention that used lay health workers to improve the knowledge of people in Same District, Tanzania about albinism.

The last article presents the results of a pilot study on the learning and retention of a traditional birth attendant's education program in rural Haiti (Priest, Speckman, McCarthy, Romocki, & Walmer, 2018). Traditional birth attendants, another form of CHWs, provide a needed health service in developing countries where women may not have access to skilled birth attendants.

Given the shortage of professionally prepared and skilled health care professionals in low incomes countries, especially rural areas, there is a need for community health workers to provide health services, health information, and implement health education/promotion programs as "frontline health workers". In addition, there is a need for community health workers in high income countries to help close the health disparities gap between racial minorities and mainstream populations.

By their very nature, CHWs play an integral role in the delivery of preventive programs to underserved populations by assisting individuals and communities to adopt healthy behaviors. Among the most important role played by CHWs is empowering community members to identify their problems, helping them develop innovative solutions, and implementing these solutions to practice. It is time we acknowledge and appreciate the role of CHWs in maintaining the health status of populations around the globe, especially as they work with monolingual, new immigrant, and other disenfranchised groups.

Special Issue Note

This article is part of the *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion* special issue, which was supported by the Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education. The entire special issue is available open access at www.fahinfo.org.

References

- American Public Health Association (2018). *Community health workers*. Retrieved from <https://www.apha.org/apha-communities/member-sections/community-health-workers>.
- Chhabra, R., Rivera, A., Sharma, N., Ghosh, S., & Bauman, L.J. (2018). Engaging community members as health advocates in a peer driven intervention – A cervical cancer prevention pilot in Punjab, India. *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion-Special Issue*, 18 (1), s36-s52.
- Fiori, K., Chodon, T., Whiskey, R., Larrier, E., Izes, J., Braganza, S., & Selwyn, P. (2018). Advancing community health and wellness in primary care: A Bronx community based organization's experience integrating community health workers in patient centered medical homes within an academic medical center. *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion-Special Issue*, 18 (1), s18-s35.
- Forster-Cox, S., Torres, E., Adams, F. (2018). Essential roles of promotores de salud on the U.S.-Mexico border: A U.S.-Mexico border health commission perspective. *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion-Special Issue*, 18 (1), s3-s17.
- Olaniran, A., Smith, H., Unkels, R., Bar-Zeev, S. & Van den Broek, N. (2017). Who is a community health workers? – A systematic review of definitions. *Global health action*, 10 (1). doi.org/10.1080/16549716.2017.1272223.
- Priest, M.C., Speckman, K.S.W., McCarthy, S., Romocki, L.S., & Walmer, D.K. (2018). Traditional birth attendant education in rural Haiti. *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion-Special Issue*, 18 (1), s65-s84.
- Singh, P. (n.d.). One million community health workers: Technical task force report. Retrieved from http://www.millenniumvillages.org/.../ReportPaper/1mCHW_TechnicalTaskForceReport.pdf
- Wubben, B., Peden, J.G., & Carithers, J. (2018). Evaluation of a lay health worker program to increase community knowledge about albinism in Same District, Tanzania. *Global Journal of Health Education and Promotion-Special Issue*, 18 (1), s53-s64.