

Community Health Workers and Community Based Research

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Purpose

The purpose of this literature review was to describe the most effective characteristics of community health workers (CHWs). CHWs are widely utilized within public health to serve their target populations in various capacities such as health education, public health initiatives, patient advocacy, and specific topic knowledge. There is a long-standing obstacle in retaining CHWs and their efficacy of work in the community. This framework will be used to improve and evaluate a current CHW program in rural Alabama that targets breast cancer awareness in African American women.

Methods

PubMed and Google Scholar were used to identify studies that met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria included the following:

- Articles from years 2010 through 2017
- Included the key word "community health worker"
- Articles surrounded CHWs in any type of setting and discussed the efficacy of CHWs
- Articles that had interviews with different parties in the process

From the search, 18 articles were found that fit the inclusion criteria. From the 18 articles that were found, 15 of them highlighted the qualities of effective community health worker interventions. To determine the trends of CHW qualities from these articles, each article was reviewed and the main points were explored. Each article was then grouped into common themes to determine the key qualities that make CHWs effective.

Implications for Women's Health

It is important to take into account the CHWs', stakeholders', and participants' opinions on what makes the interventions most effective. CHWs are often the link between rural communities and healthcare access. The characteristics found in this review of literature can be implemented in choosing effective CHWs in future rural women's health programs. Choosing culturally competent, knowledgeable women to bring breast cancer education to rural communities aids these women in improving their health, preventing future health problems, and providing them with knowledge for early detection of health issues.

Introduction

CHWs have a wide scope of practice and have been implemented in numerous settings. The use of CHWs are individual to the specific program. The following are ways CHWs can differ between programs:

- CHWs may be volunteers, receive a stipend, or be full salaried employees
- Utilized in both rural and urban settings
- CHWs have been used in numerous countries in program implementation
- Used in clinical settings and community based-settings
- Do not generally have educational requirements unless specific interventions requires certain knowledge
- CHWs usually have a specific training period to gain knowledge on the community and certain topic

Choosing the right CHW is imperative. Since the CHW has such a broad scope of practice, this literature review focuses on the varying ideas that are most important in choosing an effective CHW regardless of setting. Successes with CHWs have seen increased access to healthcare services, increased screening rates, enhanced communication and adherence to medical recommendations, and reduced utilization of emergency medical services.

Conclusions/Significance

After completing the literature review, these were the most notable qualities for a CHW to possess:

- CHWs should have a personal connection to the content and have adequate knowledge of the topic
- CHW who is a member of the community
- CHW who is motivated either by intrinsic and/or extrinsic incentives
- CHW who are socially and culturally competent of the target population
- CHW who takes a personalized approach with their target population

These characteristics help the CHW facilitate trust with their target population and help eliminate barriers to providing them information and support. In addition, in choosing the correct CHW, it is important to ensure they receive adequate training to enhance their knowledge of the topic.

Figure #1

	Author	Knowledge of Topic	Member of Community	Incentive-Based Intervention	Social and Cultural Competency	Personalized Approach
1	Kane et al.	*		*		
2	Lightfoot and Davis			*		*
3	Hsu et al.				*	
4	Carter, Dawkins and Howard				*	
5	Hohl et al.	*		*	*	
6	Han et al.				*	*
7	Richardson et al.	*				
8	Feltner et al.		*			*
9	Koniak-Griffin et al.		*		*	
10	Perry et al.				*	
11	Glenton et al.			*		
12	Gilkey, Garcia and Rush	*		*		
13	Choi et al.		*			
14	Merius and Rohan				*	*
15	Lopez et al.		*			

Figure 1 shows the five qualities that the literature review showed were the most important qualities that the CHW possess and which articles they were present in.

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A full reference list can be provided upon request.

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