



# Community Health Workers in Occupational Health

Linda Forst, Emily Ahonen, Joseph Zandoni



## Background

### Community Health Workers

"[are] lay members of communities who work either for pay or as volunteers in association with the local health care system in both urban and rural environments and usually share ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, and life experiences with the community members they serve." -- (USDHHS, 2007)

### Roles of CHWs

- Highly respected, trained for this work
- Connect peers with health care services
- Educate/train peers in illness/injury prevention and health promotion
- Provide first aid, basic care, or advice

**Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act** (Obamacare 2010) classifies CHWs as "health professionals" that are part of the "health care workforce." USDHHS will likely define the training, certification, and licensure of CHWs and require that they be employed by Federally-funded health centers to improve care of underserved populations.

### Low wage and immigrant workers subject to health inequities:

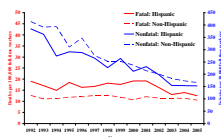
- Increased risk of illness and injury
- Poor access to appropriate health care and rehabilitation services
- Worse outcomes after occupational injury.

## Recommendation

**Formalize CHWs for low wage, precarious, and immigrant workers to reduce occupational health disparities.**

## Worker Leaders in Construction

### Case Study 1



Rates of fatal and non-fatal construction injuries, Hispanics, 1992-2009. (cpwr.com)

### METHODS

- With goal to reduce injuries among Hispanic construction day laborers, we:
  - Partnered with 9 worker centers in 7 cities
  - Adapted OSHA 10-hour for construction H&S
    - For low literacy Spanish-speakers
    - Popular education approach
  - Recruited Worker Leaders--Hispanic immigrant construction workers
    - WLS learned OH&S content
    - WLS trained to deliver training under supervision of OSHA-authorized trainer

### RESULTS

No. yrs of project	3
No. US Cities	7
No. WLS trained	28
Person-hrs Training	4892

### Worker Leaders = CHWs

- Participated in training of Worker Leaders in other cities
- Enhanced/changed curriculum
- Went on to deliver training and provide health promotion, prevention, advocacy for peers, informally

## Recommendation

- Promote development of worker leaders among worker centers
- Formalize WLS' training as CHWs

## Promotores de Salud in Agriculture

### Case Study 2

- 9003 farm workers and farmers died at work between 1992-2009 (BLS, 2011)
- Eye injuries are common among farm workers

### METHODS

To reduce eye injuries among migrant and seasonal farm workers, we:

- Partnered with migrant service orgs
- Developed a train the trainer and a training course on eye health and safety
- Recruited *promotores* to deliver training, distribute safety eyewear, track training, administer questionnaire before/after
- Sampling scheme: farm with *promotores* training vs farms without training

### RESULTS

- 705 workers participated and completed pre- and post-intervention surveys
- Workers trained by *promotores* had the highest self reported use of safety glasses (corroborated by observations)

### Promotores de Salud = CHWs

- Took materials home to Mexico to train farmer – neighbors
- Participated in other health outreach projects with migrant organization

## Recommendation

- Endorse incorporation of *promotores* directly into new CHW training. (Easy because many work out of Federally Qualified Health Centers already)
- Develop and incorporate OH&S training into *promotores*' CHW course

## Medical Interpreters in Trauma Centers

### Case Study 3

- Medical Interpreters (MIs) facilitate communication between providers and injured patients.
- Severely injured workers are cared for in trauma centers

• MIs come from the same communities/background as patients

• MI's facilitate health care services for traumatically injured, immigrant workers.

### METHODS

Focus group of MIs to explore the possibility of MIs serving as CHWs for these patients

### RESULTS

- Very knowledgeable about workplace injuries
- Interested in knowing about workers comp to provide information to patients & providers
- Feel kindred/sympathetic with the patients; no animosity re: illegal employment
- Conflicted about role as conduit vs hospital advocate vs patient advocate

### Medical Interpreters ≈ CHWs

## Recommendation

**Since MI's will be required to be certified/trained in near future, we should**

- Develop OH&S training module for MI certification courses
- Get OH&S training into formal CHW course

## Acknowledgements

- NIOSH/CDC "More Than Training: Worker Centers Empowering Hazard Awareness and Response". NIOSH #R18 OH009574
- NIOSH/CDC Illinois Education and Research Center T42/OH008672