

Community Health Workers as Organizational Representatives in Clinical Settings

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Community health workers (CHWs) are recognized for their ability to serve as a bridge between communities and the health care system. Given CHWs' deep community connections, their bridging function is mainly seen as a conduit for community members to access health care and there is limited discussion of CHWs as members of a health care organization. This roundtable presentation seeks to unpack the bridging function of CHWs from a community health center's perspective. Semi-structured interviews (n=21) were carried out in community health centers (predominantly federally qualified health centers) across four Gulf states with CHWs and CHW supervisors.

Our results illustrate how CHWs served as bridge builders by acting as gatekeepers and ambassadors for the clinic. As organizational bridge builders, CHWs in this study had the potential to more effectively address client needs by extending the clinic's reach in the community, enhancing patient access to medical and non-medical resources, and improving organizational efficiency. CHWs were enabled to serve as organizational actors when the clinic had a clear workflow, comprehensive training, organizational buy-in, and resources for CHWs to develop rapport with staff and community partners. These results highlight the value that CHWs can bring to clients and community health centers by serving as organizational actors, with potential implications for clinics in other contexts seeking to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of care delivery teams.

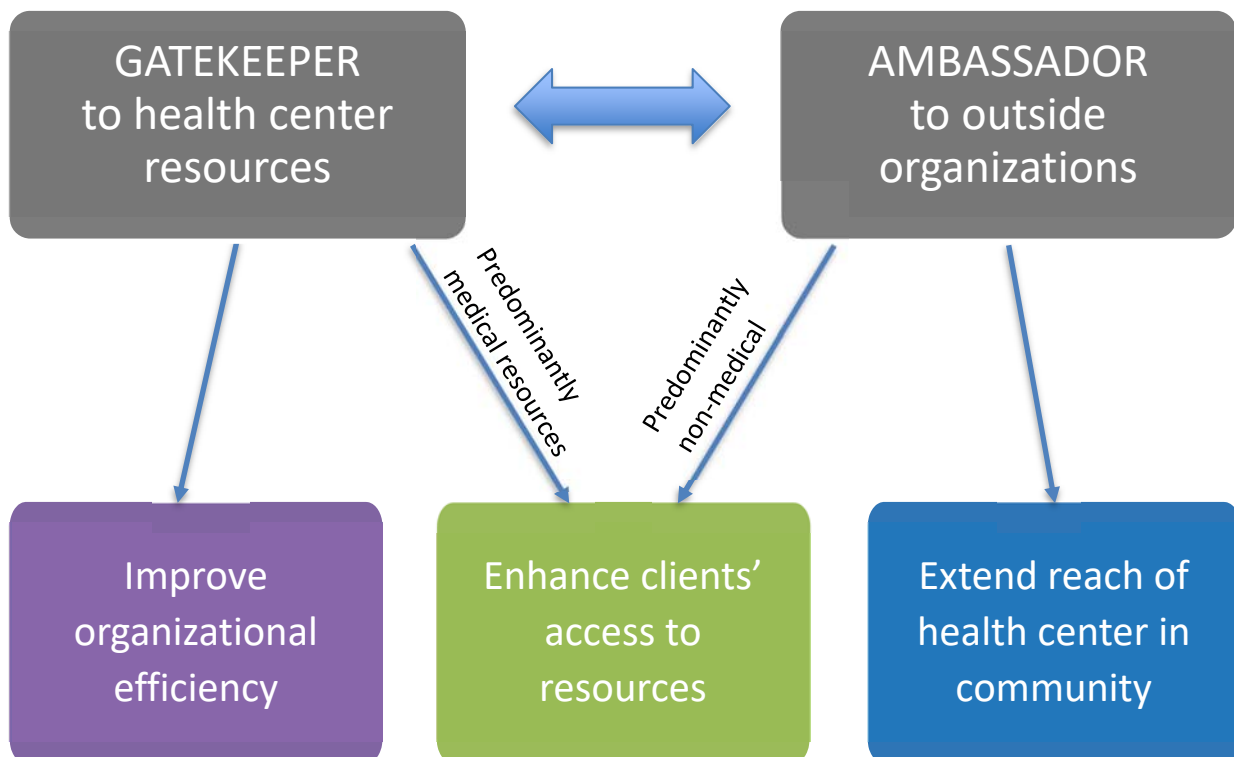


Figure 1. Benefits of community health workers acting as organizational actors in clinical settings