

## **Broadcast- Community Health Worker training teaches high-touch, high-tech support for better health**

*Building a trusting relationship is key to making a difference*

Health experts now acknowledge a person's health is largely determined by things such as how much money they make, where they live, and their access to transportation and healthy foods – social factors outside of a medical office or hospital. OSF HealthCare is launching a new program to train digitally-enabled Community Health Workers (CHWs), who can direct underserved individuals – many on Medicaid – to resources that can remove those barriers to better health.

Newly trained CHW Maura Lansing says she learned more than what she already knew from her time as a pandemic health worker, trying to support people with COVID-19 at home so they could stay out of the hospital.

**"We talked about and learned about how we could become community advocates and we could actually plan community events based around a health care issue, and all the different ways we could reach out to the community at large, as well as helping individual patients." (:18)**

Ann Willemsen-Dunlap of [OSF Jump Simulation](#) is a curriculum Karlen Sandall, manager of the [OSF OnCall](#) Digital Health Worker program, says the training through Illinois Central College in East Peoria emphasizes connecting individuals to community resources helps build trust.

**"It shows we're caring about not only what's bringing them into our health care center, but also what's going on outside of that; how we can bridge those gaps and keep them healthy all the way around, I think really shows we want to build trust with them, and we want to align them with the resources that are going to keep them safe and healthy." (:19)**

Sandall says CHWs will be embedded in the communities they serve and many are already connected to community-based organizations that provide social services.

**"To understand all of their offerings ... to understand the funding because that changes a lot with CBOs. That's something we learned with the pandemic and aligning individuals to resources so as they gather more expertise, they're definitely going to be able to guide and support individuals from the community to the resources they need." (:19)**

Ann Willemsen-Dunlap a curriculum developer for Jump Simulation and Education Center, who designed the training, said it's unique because it uses standardized participants (SPs) who are trained actors.

**"They're trained to do both coaching and give feedback to our community health worker learners and help shape the way they go forward and interact with clients later. Not many programs have this," Willemsen-Dunlap explains. (:16)**

Maura Lansing's SP acted as a man in his 50s, recently diagnosed with diabetes. She used the oars approach: open questions, affirmations, reflective listening and summary reflections ... going heavy on the affirmations.

**"I know that's a lot of hard work. Can we possibly include a quick 10-minute walk each day with the grandchildren so that you don't feel like you're having to add exercise into your already busy schedule?" Lansing says he felt heard and understood. "He seemed like, 'Wow, she understands what I'm going through.'" (:20)**

Willemsen-Dunlap says the digitally-equipped and trained CHWs will not only coordinate care with [Federally Qualified Health Centers \(FQHCs\)](#) and their provider partners, they'll help by serving as additional eyes and ears for medical providers.

**"When it comes to interacting with the clients and seeing what's happening in their home or living environment ... they can take that back to the provider and help the provider understand what might need to be tailored in some specific way to maximize treatment effectiveness." (:20)**

More advanced training will enable CHWs to help individuals and families use digital tools that might be needed for education, remote monitoring, or even a virtual exam. They can also provide calming reassurance, especially at a stressful time during a pending or recent diagnosis.

**“Having this neutral third party who’s able to manage the tech and be that intermediary and that calming, confident presence is going to be very important,” Willemsen-Dunlap stresses. (:12)**

The next training session for becoming a certified digitally-enabled CHW is on-line and starts July 11 through ICC. [There’s more information and an option to register](#) (link on the station website story).