



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Toniann Richard, 816.249.1529, Toniann@hccnetwork.org

Higginsville EMS Providers Now Certified as Community Health Workers Move Expected to Improve Community Health, Reduce Medical Costs in Lafayette County

A community health worker (CHW) serves on the frontline as public health workers who have a close understanding of the community they serve. They are trusted members of the community who act as liaisons between health and social services and the community. The ultimate goal is to support access to services.

Couple the work of a CHW with the role of one who works as an emergency medical service (EMS) provider, and the potential to impact a community's physical and mental health is huge. The Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri and its Live Well Community Health Centers have partnered with Higginsville EMS to do just that. They will serve all of Lafayette County as certified community health workers. The State of Missouri has expanded EMS licensure to include the CHW certification.

"It is going to help reduce hospital readmittances within 30 days of dismissal," said Suzanne Smith, HCC's director of network development. "People who don't understand their hospital discharge directions will have someone who will follow up with them. It will be a great care coordination model." Smith said she is hopeful that HCC and its Live Well Centers can partner with the Community Paramedic Program that Higginsville EMS is implementing and add a CHW to the mix.

Currently, two Higginsville EMS providers have completed in-class training. "We are currently in the clinical stage," said Matt Cushman, director of Higginsville EMS. "We are hoping to send one or two more personnel to get certified in the next round of classes." These certifications are regulated by the State of Missouri. The Metropolitan Community College (MCC) offers the certification. Cushman said in-class work toward certification took place from October 2016 to January 2017, and he is looking for additional personnel to complete certifications in June.

"Our goals here are to help provide a prevention program for in-home injuries, reduce the use of frequent EMS users, help EMS users with in-home care and discharge transition, reduce readmissions and eventually take referrals for help," Cushman said. "We would be able to help people set up medications at home, make doctor's appointments or help them find resources or information on issues they may be experiencing. Our goal is to save lives but also help reduce medical costs. "

Lafayette County EMS/CHWs are in good company. Kansas City, Missouri's Central Jackson County Fire Protection District has had a similar program for about nine months. Olathe has had its program for about two years and also has a CHW-certified nurse practitioner. Cushman said their program has resulted in reduced usage of medical services which constitutes health care savings.