**Title:** The role of community (health) volunteers in promoting improved, responsive and equitable primary health care in LMICs, and strategies to support them: a systematic review

**Theme**: Human Resources for Health (HRH)

**Speaker:** Dina Balabanova, Senior Lecturer, Health Systems/Policy

Department of Global Health & Development

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

15-17 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SH

+44 (0)20 7927 2104

**Co-authors:** Tesfamichael Alaro, Bitiya Admasu, Kirstin Mitchell, Susannah Mayhew, Martin McKee, Mirkuzie Woldie

**Purpose**

Community health worker (CHW) programmes have expanded significantly in some under-resourced health systems (e.g. Nepal, Indonesia, Brazil, Ethiopia, Uganda) providing basic primary care. In some, these have been supported by community health volunteers (CHV), drawn from local communities and with only basic training. However, their roles are not well understood and the PROSPERO database contains no systematic reviews of their activities.

**Focus/content**

We critically appraise and synthesize evidence on the scope for CHVs to support accessible, responsive and equitable primary health care in low and middle income countries. CHVs are multi-purpose workers based in their communities, active across sectors (health, education etc). They are not formally compensated, have limited training, and must mobilise local financial and social resources. While not part of government health structures, they might improve access to healthcare. We ask:

1. What are the (a) different roles played by CHVs, (b) reasons for roles assigned and (c) implications for PHC in LMICs?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators to achieving their potential?

The review covers the years from 1978 (Alma-Ata declaration envisaging a role for CHVs) to 2016, including qualitative and quantitative studies of CHVs. Electronic databases searched include: Medline, EMBASE, The Cochrane and JBI Library of Systematic Reviews, government and international agencies websites, Global Health, Cochrane library, WHOLIS, Worldcat, HMIC, etc. as well as grey literature databases such as SCOPUS, websites of international organisations and reference tracing. Relevant abstracts were screened independently by two reviewers, with quality appraisal, extraction and analysis conducted by a team of four reviewers. A scoping review has identified >100 studies.

The JBI-SUMARI 5.0 was used for conducting the review, using JBI Narrative, Opinion and Text Assessment and Review Instrument (NOTARI) tools suited to the largely qualitative reports including project evaluation reports, policy documents, and expert opinion.

Emerging findings show that CHVs can make a valuable contribution and high levels of retention are possible but not inevitable. However, both require attention to motivation, achieved through skills acquisition and realisation that they are making a difference.

***Significance for the sub-theme area/field-building dimension***

Community volunteers (distinct from CHWs) offer an untapped potential to accelerate PHC improvement and community engagement in local health issues. This is the first synthesis of evidence on these cadres.

***Target audience***

The review will provide researchers, policy-makers and implementers with knowledge of the potential contributions of the volunteers in LMICs seeking to build resilient and participatory PHC care.

Word count 400