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Fall opening set for new community health center

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HERALD REPORTER

NEW BRITAIN — A new community health center that will offer medical and dental care for adults and children — insured, uninsured and underinsured alike — is being planned for One Washington Square in downtown. The facility's opening is scheduled in the fall.

Community Health Center Inc. of Middletown, is planning to open the center, which will target uninsured workers and their families, the elderly, and underinsured families, such as those with high deductibles or no coverage for preventive care.

According to the plans, CHC will also take over management of New Britain General Hospital's clinics. NBGH's internal medicine and pediatric clinics provide non-emergency treatment and physical check-ups for adults and children who are uninsured or on state assistance.

In order to proceed with its plans, CHC needs numerous approval from the state, including from the state Commission on Hospitals and Health Care.

Last week, CHC requested

that the public hearing required for the proposal be waived, according to the state Commission on Hospitals and Health Care. That requirement is usually waived for community health centers, according Mark Masselli, president and chief executive officer of CHC.

In service and appearance,

CHC's 12,000-to 15,000-square foot facility will be no different than a private doctor/group practice office, according to literature on the project.

The main difference will be that fees for service will be based on a sliding fee scale.

Because the center will provide 24-hour emergency cover-

age and in-patient care for patients requiring hospitalization, the center is expected to decrease inappropriate use of emergency room services at New Britain General Hospital.

Laurence Tanner, president of NBGH, said the partnership

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between NBGH and CHC will benefit everyone involved.

Initially, NBGH officials were concerned that CHC would open a facility that would duplicate the hospital's services.

"We didn't want to see an entity come in and siphon off patients from the hospital," Tanner said.

Tanner said the hospital was also concerned about the new clinic cutting into NBGH's residency programs. NBGH is one of the training hospitals associated with the University of Connecticut.

Because the hospital's two clinics are general-practice offices, they provide a training ground for general medicine. Most of the hospital's other department's deal with specialized doctors.

All of that was worked out with CHC. According to the plans, the hospital's clinics will

operate the way they have been, but will be managed by CHC.

"We will sub-contract our employees to them, and lease them space," he said. "Doing it that way will provide the most continuity."

By having two sites — one on this side of the highway, and their main site on the other side of the highway — CHC can better serve the underinsured population, Tanner said.

"We really feel we can all serve the medically underinsured better," Tanner said.

Masselli said CHC is honored to be associated with NBGH.

"NBGH is probably the best hospital in Connecticut," Masselli said. "NBGH is our model of concern and compassion. We will strive to meet their standards."

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