

Medical centers agree to combine

By **Maria Garriga**
Record-Journal staff

MERIDEN — Two nonprofit medical care centers have agreed to join forces.

The Meri-Care Health Services board of directors has approved plans to consolidate with Community Health Center Inc. of Middletown.

Larry Kibner, chairman of Meri-Care's board of directors, said the consolidation, approved Wednesday, "put all the resources, not just financial but equipment and human resources, in one place. It's a stronger organization."

Kibner said that Meri-Care has contemplated the move for six months. Kibner has been chairman of the board for four of Meri-Care's five years of existence.

"It was a little sad in the first place," Kibner said, but "it was for all the right reasons."

CHC runs medical centers on State Street and in Groton, New London, Middletown, New Britain and Old Saybrook.

"Our mission is to provide quality affordable health care to the uninsured and the underinsured population in a manner that respects their dignity,"

said Mark Masselli, president and chief executive officer of CHC.

Meri-Care's full-time staff will move into CHC's building at 134 State St. In addition to providing low cost medical services, CHC offers mental health services, while Meri-Care staffs a dental clinic. The dental clinic will remain at 165 Miller St., next to the city's Health Department. The dental clinic will continue to be called the Meri-Care Dental Clinic, to recognize Meri-Care's contribution to community health care, Masselli said.

Marcie Dimenstein, executive director of Meri-Care, said "Meri-Care's board of directors decided that the needs of the patients are best served by joining forces with the other health-care center in town."

CHC will offer patients access to 24-hour call coverage and CHC patients will be able to use all Veterans Memorial Medical Center services.

Masselli said he expects at most only a few layoffs at either agency. Kibner agreed that full-time Meri-Care staff will join CHC, but the boards have not decided whether to keep all of Meri-Care's part-time positions.

Three members of Meri-Care's board of directors will join CHC's Meriden Advisory Board; one of the Meri-Care representatives will co-chair the committee.

Kibner said he plans to join the advisory committee "to see the agreement followed through and to see that all employees are taken care of."

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