

Programs offer alternative for care expenses

Community Health Center, HealthRight ease dilemmas of uninsured, underinsured

By Mary Milewski
STAFF WRITER

The population's coverage can be broken down into traditional commercial insurance, Medicare and Medicaid. But there are still uninsured citizens.

The Community Health Center offers an alternative for uninsured and underinsured residents. It operates primary care facilities in six cities including Middletown, New Britain, Meriden, New London, Old Saybrook and Groton.

"The Community Health Center is the largest provider of primary healthcare services to the underserved and uninsured in the state of Connecticut," said President and CEO Mark Masselli.

Services are provided on a sliding-scale fee basis. CHC also accepts HealthRight insurance, a Meriden-based managed care plan with over 30,000 members statewide.

HealthRight formed three years ago through a union between CHC and Community Health Services in Hartford, and it is already the second largest of all Connecticut plans offering Medicaid Managed Care services, said Masselli, HealthRight board of directors member.

HealthRight is a government funded Medicaid-only plan that formed when the state announced a year ago that it

would put the majority of enrollees to managed care.

Since then, over 220,000 people have been put into managed care from Medicaid, Masselli said.

"HealthRight is an HMO founded along the lines that it would truly be in the best interests of the poor and the community," said Laurence Tanner, president and CEO of New Britain General Hospital, which contracts with HealthRight.

It has a broad provider network. About two thirds of HealthRight's clients go to private doctors and one third of them go to the Community Health Center. Most of the hospitals in the state also participate, said Dr. Helen Smits, HealthRight's president and medical director.

"We try to sign up as many doctors as possible because we want people to have as much choice and as many options as possible," Masselli said. "We fundamentally believe that health care is a right and not a privilege. It's very important for Americans to have a health care system that works."

In order to achieve such a system, he added, today's health care debate needs a "larger and broader dialogue."

The HealthRight insurance organization is set apart from others in the state in terms of its clientele.

"The average age of our mem-

bers is 14," Smits said. "It's really different to do Medicaid only."

The most common service it covers in hospitals is normal delivery. "We are primarily a women and children service focusing on preventive services," she added.

All HealthRight representatives are bilingual in Spanish.

"About 25 percent of our members would rather do it (communicate) in Spanish than in English. And some of our special programs are aimed at the problems of this population including a high-risk maternity program and an asthma program," Smits said.

Services are heavily focused on maternity care. They try to track everyone who's pregnant and provide health care that is needed along with transportation, home care services. All programs are completely funded by the state, based on eligibility categories. Most clients are the poor heads of house holds and their children - many of the working poor in Middlesex, Hartford and New London Counties.

HealthRight is now sponsoring its annual Talent Search. The competitive event is "for kids to teach each other and themselves about healthy living through singing, dancing and skits," Smits said. For more information call 1-800-474-1444, extension 4078.