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Nonprofit medical practice in Bristol to help uninsured

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By JACKIE MAJERUS
STAFF WRITER

BRISTOL — A new medical practice that specializes in treating uninsured and underinsured people is opening this month in downtown Bristol.

Director Yvette Highsmith-Francis said she will open the Bristol office of Community Health Center Inc. with a physician, nurse and receptionist.

“We’re really a safety-net organization,” said Highsmith-Francis.

She said the center, which primarily serves people on Medicaid, SAGA and other similar programs as well as people without any insurance, is a family practice office that will begin seeing patients Monday.



It is by appointment only and not an urgent care center or walk-in clinic, she said. It is also not a surgery or specialty center, but a primary-care office.

“We take anyone who needs a medical home,” said Highsmith-Francis. “If you have a doctor somewhere else, you can’t see us.”

Anyone who already has a primary-care physician and wants to use Community Health Center instead has to transfer their records, she said.

Those without insurance pay a fee according to a six-tiered sliding scale based on household size and income, she said. Fees can be as low as \$10 for the poorest patients.

Self-employed people make up many of those served.

The small office — in the CVS plaza at 59 N. Main St., facing Laurel Street and City Hall — is one of a dozen nonprofit Community Health Centers in Connecticut, said Highsmith-Francis. The organization started in 1972 in Middletown, she said, as a free dental clinic and now provides dental work in 140 Connecticut schools.

Dr. Melanie Rausche will be the primary care physician staffing the Bristol office, according to Highsmith-Francis.

They provide a scope of services that includes primary medical care, dental care and behavioral health care. Not all offices offer everything, and at least initially, the Bristol office will not offer dental care.

The Community Health Center has an office in New Britain that serves 12,000 patients, said Highsmith-Francis. She said 900 or more are Bristol residents.

Many of the Bristol residents will probably stay with the New Britain practice rather than switch doctors, she said, but she still expects about two-thirds to transfer to the new Bristol office.

“Transportation is an issue for people,” she said. “We hope to be able to grow based on the needs of the community.”

The Community Health Centers are under federal oversight, she said, and qualify for higher reimbursement rates for services to Medicaid patients and low-cost prescription drugs for uninsured patients.

In order for her organization to set up an office in Bristol, Highsmith-Francis said, the city had to qualify as a medically underserved community without enough primary-care physicians for its residents.

The Bristol office will at times offer the services of a nutritionist, a diabetes educator and a podiatrist to serve diabetics, she said.

The office will help uninsured people file directly to the state Department of Social Services for assistance, said Highsmith-Francis.

For those who are income eligible, the lab work is free through Quest and prescriptions are at wholesale, or government rates, she said, at Walgreens.

Highsmith-Francis said the office will begin making appointments next week. Anyone interested can call at (860) 585-5000.

Comments

The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of [bristolpress.com](http://www.bristolpress.com).

jen wrote on Feb 11, 2010 11:37 PM:

" I think that is a wonderful thing you are doing, my hats off to you. "

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JP wrote on Feb 12, 2010 9:29 AM:

" Wonderful!! I personally have insurance, but know many who do not. In fact, I know someone who has pulled out some of her own teeth because they were so loose and hurt so badly, she could not eat. Please work on the dental service, there are many people in this area who need help. Good luck. "

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Jane wrote on Feb 12, 2010 12:50 PM:

" Everyone should be provided the opportunity to receive medical treatment. As long as it doesn't bring in a criminal element I'm all for it. "

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Korrupt wrote on Feb 12, 2010 12:55 PM:

" This will be a great centerpiece to the proposed Depot Square project. Downtown will definitely be a magnet for Yuppies and empty nesters, more so than before. "

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ROJP wrote on Feb 13, 2010 10:00 AM:

" I think this is wonderful. There are folks that genuinely need this help. To think that some have to decide whether they're going to eat, stay warm, or get medical attention, they now can be assured of medical attention. Let's be sure those that really need it, get it. When you see someone with a cigarette, a cell phone or other non-essential things, do they really qualify for this program? I know that I have given up some pleasantries so I can heat my home and feed my family. "

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Shivan wrote on Feb 14, 2010 2:23 PM:

" thanks for the medical information
Quality Medical Transcription and Medical Billing Services "

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Jane K. wrote on Feb 15, 2010 1:54 AM:

" I am so glad that these services are being offered. My family is lucky enough to have insurance, but in my line of work I see uninsured patients daily who might have avoided getting as sick as they do if they had access to a primary care doctor and basic preventative healthcare. Having mental health services is wonderful, too. This will do a lot of good.

And to "Korrupt": Where do you propose the center be placed? On Chippen's Hill? It needs to be in a location where it's patient base is. It's on a bus route. It's located in one of the lower-income areas of the city, probably within walking distance for some of its patients. I fail to see how having this clinic in that location would be

harmful to any plans to "revitalize" downtown. There are numerous other doctor's offices in that area. One more isn't going to make a difference. It's going to HELP people! "

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