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Giving care where it really helps out

By [Judy Benson](#) Day Staff Writer

Homeless center's health clinic aims to meet people's needs

New London - When Nena Richardson and Monica Morese ended up homeless, they found not only shelter but also easy access to the health care they needed at the New London Homeless Hospitality Center.

"They really helped me out," said Richardson, who sought care to get her high blood pressure under control, as well as medications for depression and anxiety.

Morese said she came to the shelter a few weeks ago after being released from prison. The day after she arrived, she said, she received care for her aching gums and medical advice about handling her bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"People's needs are really being met," Morese said. "Some people when they come to the shelter don't want to leave and go to another place for health care, but now they can just come here."

Richardson and Morese received medical care downstairs from the shelter's sleeping quarters, in the three-room health clinic that began serving patients a month ago. The shelter opened in a newly renovated building on State Pier Road a year ago after a \$1.2 million project. The medical clinic is one of seven being run at homeless shelters around the state by the Community Health Center, which also runs larger primary care clinics in New London and Groton.

"By having it in the shelter, we eliminate any barriers to getting health care," said Kasey Harding, director of integrated care for special populations for the health center.

The clinic is open from 8 a.m. to noon on Mondays and Wednesdays, staffed by Advance Practice Registered Nurse Krishna Kothary and Medical Assistant Jessy Angeles. Most of the 15 to 20 patients per week they've been seeing thus far have Medicare, Medicaid or other insurance that covers the cost of the care, and those without insurance are not charged, Harding said.

"Patients that come should think of me as their primary care provider," said Kothary, who also provides care at the health center's clinic in Shaw's Cove.

The shelter has been working with the Community Health Center for several years, said Cathy Zall, the shelter's executive director, and the new shelter was designed from the outset to include the clinic. Funding for the space came out of the budget for the shelter project, while the Community Health Center is covering operating costs for the clinic through a federal grant for homeless health care.

"This brings health care services to where the people are, and will improve their connection to medical care," Zall said.

The clinic is serving people staying at the shelter with chronic conditions such as diabetes and COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), as well as those with open wounds and other acute needs, Zall said. Getting people connected to health care, she said, is often one of the components needed to move those who are homeless into stable, permanent housing.

In addition to Kothary and Angeles, the health center also brings its mobile dental clinic there, and will soon be adding a counselor to provide mental health care. Among patients who've come to the clinic thus far is a woman with chronic low blood pressure who was

frequently going to the emergency room, Kothary said. "She didn't know how to manage her condition," she said. "Now she knows what to do and when to call someone. We've kept her from going to the emergency room at least twice."

Another patient was a 74-year-old woman who was brought to the shelter with just one change of clothes after being discharged from a hospital in another part of the state. The woman was disoriented and needed more medical care, Kothary said. After assessing the woman, Kothary had her taken to a local hospital for an overnight stay, and shelter staff arranged for her to move into supportive housing.

"Sometimes it's just a matter of getting their care coordinated," she said.

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