

## Health center pharmacy offers better care

*By Steven Scarpa, Record-Journal staff*

MERIDEN — The new Walgreens pharmacy at the Community Health Center on State Street has been open for a little over a month and pharmacist Jonah Tyler believes it is already making a difference.

Patients who might not have gotten the prescriptions they need if they had to travel across town are now stopping on the way out of their doctor's visit. Tyler is also able to work directly with a patient's clinical team, bringing a cohesiveness to care that is not usually possible when pharmacists and doctors work removed from each other.

"Our goal is to help people," Tyler said.

Health Center officials, along with U.S. Rep. Nancy L. Johnson and state Rep. Christopher G. Donovan, celebrated the pharmacy's grand opening Monday morning. The pharmacy is the first in the country actually housed in a community health center, which is a federally funded institution. Officials praised the opening of the pharmacy as an example of a positive interaction between the government, the public and the private sector.

"This is a great day for the Community Health Center," said Mark Masselli, health center president and chief executive officer.

"Now when we diagnose a patient, we can treat that patient," said Margaret Flinter, vice president and clinical director of the health center.

The center serves about 8,000 people in Meriden, many of whom have low incomes and limited access to health care. The center has eight locations across Connecticut and serves a total of 70,000 patients.

In addition to improved care, uninsured patients will now have access to prescription drugs at inexpensive prices. "People who are uninsured end up paying the most out of pocket," Flinter said.

For example, Tyler said some 10-day antibiotic programs could cost more than \$150. Thanks to the partnership with the federal government, as much as 50 to 75 percent could be knocked off the cost, Tyler said. "The results have been fantastic. We are getting busier every week," Tyler said.

Masselli likened the current system of prescription drug help to the food pantry model — a mother, in order to fill her bare cupboard, travels from pantry to pantry, picking up a staple here and there. No one place can provide her all the help she needs. Thanks to the partnership between Walgreens and the health center, that will change, Masselli said. "That mother is going to do whatever she has to do to work through that dysfunctional system ... It is a fundamental right for all Americans to have access to prescription drugs," Masselli said.

"The CHC is the model of integrated holistic care," Johnson said.

There are likely to be additional developments at the Meriden center. Donovan said he helped win passage of a measure to provide \$2.5 million in bond revenue for expansion at the site. It is pending approval by the State Bond Commission. The money would be used to add space with the goal of improving the center's dental and medical care offerings.



**Officials tour the new Walgreen's Pharmacy inside the Community Health Center on State Street in Meriden after the ribbon-cutting ceremony Monday morning. (Chris French / Record-Journal)**