

Free dental care is manna to uninsured

By Samaia Hernandez
Record-Journal staff

WALLINGFORD — Fabiola Garcia was nervous when she stepped into a sterilized exam room Monday for a routine dental cleaning and exam. Eight years had passed since her last cleaning and the town resident and stay-at-home mother of two didn't know what to expect once she



popped down in the chair. She was the eighth of 10 patients to visit dental hygienist Caroline Pawlak's mobile dental clinic Monday as part of its three-day visit to the Master's Manna food pantry and resource center, at 46 North Plains Industrial Road.

After about half an hour, Garcia, 27, sat up with a smile and a referral to a follow-up appointment at the Community Health Center in Meriden.

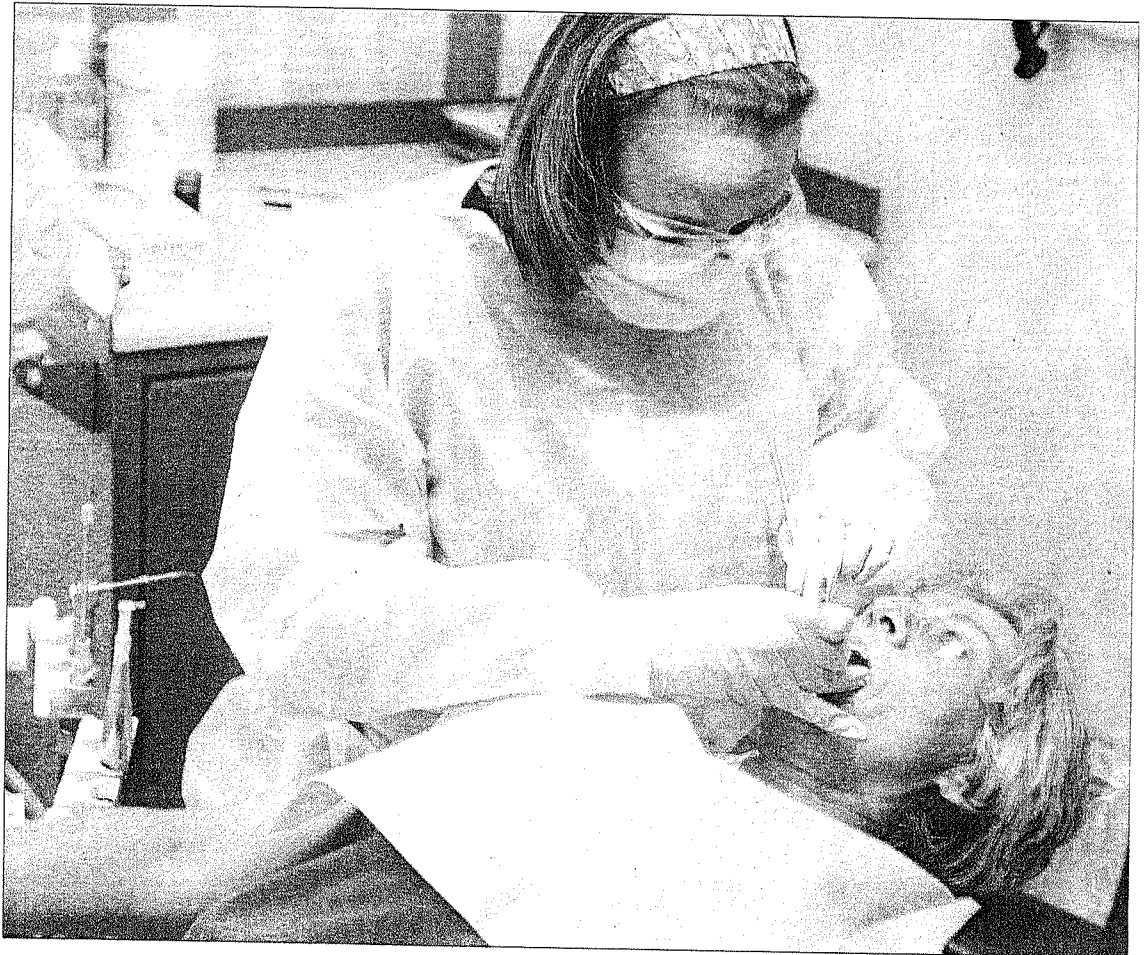
"We could have been here for four weeks," said Pawlak, who has worked as a hygienist with the center's traveling Wherever You Are program for a year. "We try to come back every six months so we can catch the full wave."

But the visiting dental clinic is only a small portion of the federally funded Middletown-based health center's recent outreach in town through its Healthcare for the Homeless program.

Since April, the center has established and run a weekly full service walk-in medical clinic for the uninsured. Demand for the program has waitlists backed up for two weeks.

"In general we go to shelters, so Master's Manna is a little bit different than all of the other locations that we're going to, but we found out there's a need and a way to make this happen," said Agi Erickson, director of the homeless program. "Whoever is coming to Master's Manna, we offer them services if they don't have a regular doctor."

Of the 10 to 12 patients seen on a given Thursday, most are



Rob Beecher / Record-Journal

Dental hygienist Caroline Pawlak performs a dental hygiene assessment before cleaning the teeth of Wanda Belanger, of Meriden, Monday at Master's Manna in Wallingford.

Wallingford residents, Erickson said. When patients require assistance beyond that the visiting doctor can provide, they are referred to full-service clinics such as the one in Meriden.

"We are very happy that we

are in Wallingford, which is right next to Meriden, where we can reach out to the folks who otherwise were unable to get medical care," Erickson said.

Dr. Dipak Patel of the Meriden clinic has signed up regu-

larly so patients can see the same provider in Wallingford. The clinic has been up and running with a fully furnished exam room since April 29.

Garcia was referred to Meriden Monday for what appeared to be an infection in

her gums.

"This was a good start," Pawlak told Garcia after the cleaning. "But we need to get you into the clinic to continue this. We cannot remove years and years of tartar buildup."

Cheryl Bedore, who founded

the food pantry four years ago in the basement of the Church of the Nazarene says the dental and medical clinics are just a piece in the larger puzzle of helping residents in need.

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by partisanship on the commission and what he says is a lack of concern for the tenants. The authority owns and operates 317 low- and moderate-income rental units in town.

Kelliher was appointed to be tenant commissioner in 2005, and left the commission last September when she moved and was no longer a tenant. At the authority's April meeting, she read a letter which said the sole reason for her appointment was to help oust Nere.

In the letter, Kelliher also said she was asked by Democrats to vote in favor of rescinding Nere's contract, which Kelliher wouldn't do.

"I felt it was time the truth came out," she said Monday. "I think the people of this town should know what's going on."

Democratic Town Chairman Vincent Avallone said the voting record shows that Kelliher began to fall more in line with Republicans than with her own party.

Avallone said Republicans and Nere were "uncomfort-

"The face of the people coming through the door has changed," said Bedore of the soup kitchen and pantry that fed a total of 1,453 people in June. "We are now seeing a lot of underemployed folks. That's the core of what we're seeing: people who have lost benefits, people who have lost overtime. That's who's coming through the door."

"People need to know what resources are available," she added. "We really have to provide avenues to send these people to get the assistance they need."

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committee and a state representative

"They're trying next phase in planning what you do with a design first," Mushinsky said.

"Doing the same thing is doing, they're easy parts first ... tier for them to buy of way they already

Mushinsky said as the one Merid undertake help in of land that could for trail purposes and possible stream and state funding used to construct phases of the trail

The council of is in the process consultants for the Dudley said he study to begin by

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