

Our Community Health Center

By Suze Hargraves

August 9th through the 15th is National Community Health Center Week. We're fortunate to have a community health center right here in our own community. In my travels out and about in the community I'm always amazed at how many people in our valley don't know what the White Mountain Community Health Center is or what it does. The health center is what's called a "safety net" provider. In simple terms that means that WMCHC is there to provide care for the uninsured and underinsured here in the valley and western Maine. We offer a sliding fee scale which means what you pay is based on income and family size. We also accept Medicaid, Medicare, MaineCare and most health insurances. You get something even more important than all that though; you get compassion, caring and quality, affordable care for your whole family.

You might ask "Why do we need a community health center here in Conway?" The answer is multifold. Yes, unemployment is a huge contributing factor to the numbers of the uninsured in our area, but there's more to it than that. Many of our local businesses are independently owned and operated and the cost of obtaining health insurance is simply unaffordable. Carroll County has the largest number of self employed individuals in the state. Many people work part time at multiple jobs which excludes them from health insurance eligibility with larger companies because of their part time status. Those who have health insurance often find themselves unable to cover astronomical deductibles, leaving the insured effectively but not literally, uninsured. All of these scenarios are very real for individuals living and working in the Mount Washington Valley. For each of these individuals and families White Mountain Community Health Center provides not only medical and support services at affordable prices, but also a medical home thereby preventing unnecessary use of the emergency department for routine care.

I have actually heard it said that a "health center" is just for (and this one makes my blood curdle) "people who can't afford real doctors". That statement could not possibly be more wrong. Health centers work under the same laws and guidelines as any other medical practice. On top of that, because they receive grants, state and local money to fund programs, they are required to do extensive and detailed reporting to the funding parties. Every single program that a health center operates is subject to periodic inspections and work plan evaluation by the entities that fund those programs. Quality of care is as mission critical and closely monitored in a health center as it is in any private practice.

The team at WMCHC consists of a physician, highly experienced nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, registered nurses and medical assistants. We employ a dentist, dental assistant and hygienist who treat children in our Health Smiles Dental Program. Partners in Health is a program serving families with chronically ill children or teens on an outreach basis. We also have other services such as social work, nutrition and mental health counseling for our patients. There are even more services and programs than could be listed here.

We're fortunate to have an entity like White Mountain Community Health Center right here in our own neighborhood providing affordable care for you and your family. If you're not sure if a community health center is right for you; feel free to call the health center for more information at 447-8900 and they'll help you decide.

Remember that everyone deserves quality health care without judgment or prejudice. Being there for you and your family is what community health centers are all about.

Suze Hargraves is a staff member and writer for White Mountain Community Health Center, a non-profit health care provider serving the Mount Washington Valley. Call (603) 447-8900, Ext. 1, for an appointment or information.