

By Bulletin Editorial Board

Print Page

August 14, 2015 8:21PM

Our View: UCFS' long-sought federal designation was well-deserved

This morning we congratulate United Community & Family Services, the Norwich-based health and human services nonprofit that has, after years of effort, received a federal designation that will allow it to continue its growth and strengthen its service to the region.

The well-deserved recognition from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will unlock funding and cost savings that will enable UCFS to hire two dozen employees and grow its client base by one-third. That's a major boon for both the agency and the Eastern Connecticut community as a whole, which will have increased access to its affordable care.

The victory was sweetened by its timing, coming in the midst of National Health Center Week, which ends today. The most visible piece of UCFS' observance of the occasion: 17,000 white and blue flag adorning the Norwichtown Green, each representing an Eastern Connecticut patient the agency has helped in the past year.

UCFS offers an array of services at its five Eastern Connecticut health centers, including the recently expanded Edward and Mary Lord Family Health Center on Town Street: primary care, behavioral health, women's health, dental, community health and elder care.

The agency's newly won status as a federally qualified health center sets up an additional \$1.1 million in funding over the next two years, allowing it to offer those services to still more Eastern Connecticut residents. The designation also will save UCFS about \$200,000 annually in malpractice insurance costs by covering it under the Federal Tort Claims Act.

UCFS became a federally qualified "look-alike" in 2002, which made it eligible for increased Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements. But the full designation — and its millions in funding — has eluded the nonprofit three times in the last several years.

It is telling that, during that time, UCFS completed a \$5.5 million expansion to its Norwich health center and has worked tirelessly to enroll residents under the Affordable Care Act in addition to upholding its fundamental mission — showing that, no matter what its status or access to funding, it has always been committed to the community and its health needs.

We also congratulate outgoing CEO Chuck Seeman, for whom the long-sought win comes mere months before his planned retirement. And here's to hoping the 17,000 flags grow in number over the years.

That's our opinion. What's yours? Email letters@norwichbulletin.com.

<http://www.norwichbulletin.com/article/20150814/OPINION/150819829>

Print Page