

This is a printer-friendly version of an article from www.theday.com or www.zip06.com.
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Aug 14, 2013

UCFS health center expansion entering new phase

By [Judy Benson](#) Day Staff Writer

Norwich - Until next June, the exam rooms, offices and hallways of United Community & Family Service will be even busier than normal, as the health clinic undertakes the third and final phase of a five-year expansion and renovation project while continuing to serve a growing number of patients.

"The next 11 months will be very interesting for us," said Pamela Kinder, vice president of facilities and marketing for the Town Street health center, which expects to provide medical, dental and behavioral health care for 107,000 patients in the current fiscal year, more than twice the number it treated just seven years ago.

"It'll be business as usual for us" on the health care side, she said, even as construction workers wield power saws and nail guns while some exam rooms and offices are temporarily relocated. This morning, UCFS will celebrate the groundbreaking for the \$3.8 million project, which will add new waiting rooms, a new entrance, 12 medical exam rooms, 27 behavior health offices and one dental office, bringing the total size of the clinic to 46,000 square feet, Kinder said. Among speakers at the event will be Janette Edwards, manager of community benefits at The William W. Backus Hospital; Evelyn Barnum, chief executive officer of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut; and Chuck Seaman, president and chief executive officer of UCFS. The ceremony coincides with the annual National Health Center Week, an event that highlights the contributions of health centers.

As part of UCFS' health center week activities, it has enlisted staff at several local businesses today to wear teal T-shirts with the phrase, "1 in 14 counts on UCFS." The statement, Kinder explained, refers to the fact that 1 in 14 New London County residents uses the center's services. Businesses where the T-shirts will be worn include Verizon, Chili's in Montville, the Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, CorePlus Federal Credit Union, Dime Bank and Eastern Savings Bank. When the construction project is completed, Kinder said, the center's reach will expand even farther.

"When we complete the renovations, we'll be increasing health care access by 47 percent, and adding 21 new permanent jobs," Kinder said. "It's huge. To have a healthy community you have to have access to medical, behavioral health and dental services."

Demand for UCFS services has been growing steadily over the past decade, fueled by the weak economy that has seen more workers lose jobs and health insurance coverage and turn to Medicaid, Medicare and places like UCFS, Kinder said. About 64 percent of UCFS patients are covered by Medicaid, the federal program for those with low incomes, while 19 percent have private insurance, 10 percent are uninsured or pay out-of-pocket, and 7 percent are covered by Medicare.

Located on a busy commercial road, the center in 2011 acquired the former grocery store plaza where it is located. In February, the Pagoda Chinese restaurant vacated the adjoining space, opening up 3,200 square feet of space for new medical and behavioral health offices for the clinic. Future plans call for a second floor to be built on the former Chinese restaurant for UCFS offices. "Our goal was to maximize space for clinical services, and increase access," she said. "It's been a long time in the planning stage."

The center received a \$3.4 million state grant to fund the construction, and has been trying to raise an additional \$461,000 to cover the entire cost. Toward that goal, the Edward & Mary Lord Foundation has provided a \$50,000 matching grant, Dime Bank has pledged \$10,000, the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut Foundation has pledged \$5,000, and an anonymous donor has given \$20,000, Kinder said.

The center is also increasing access by adding more hours. Starting in September, Kinder said, it will be open for medical and dental services from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first and third Saturdays

of each month. It will also expand Friday hours for behavior health and dental care to 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

j.benson@theday.com
