

## **Regional, local officials make push for preventative health *Program is part of a national advocacy effort by CMS***

By MICHAEL NEARY, Messenger staff writer

Regional and local health officials gathered in front of the Community Health Center of Fort Dodge Tuesday afternoon to promote preventive health and to remind residents of fairly new Medicare services.

Mark Gilbert, the regional administrator for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), also observed a “beautiful synergy” between regional officials and local community health providers as they administer their services.

In advocating prevention, Gilbert mentioned small steps such as walking more, eating less and avoiding “risky behavior” such as smoking.

Dennis Williams, deputy administrator of Health Resources and Services Administration, noted that 90 million people in the country live with chronic disease and that 36,000 die every year from flu-related complications. Williams, too, advocated for preventive services.

“A few small changes can make a big difference,” he said.

After the presentation, Gilbert acknowledged that for many people who do not have insurance, following up on problems discovered in a screening can pose a challenge.

“There’s not an easy answer for that,” he said, noting the growing national debate — seeping into the presidential campaigns — on health care and insurance.

Krystal Crotts, clinic manager for the Community Health Center, said a program called Iowa Cares funds medical treatment for lower-income residents. She noted that the program includes transportation to Iowa City — where residents receive the treatment — but she said the price of a hotel room and the time off from work can create obstacles.

The regional officials arrived on a bus at about 2 p.m. and spoke to the group of about 25 standing on the sidewalk in front of the center.

Crotts said the vast majority of the people who came belonged to support organizations with “an interest in serving the Medicare population.”

Also speaking at the event were Pat Goedken, board treasurer for the Community Health Center; Fred Schuster, regional director of the Kansas City office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Theodore J. Boesen, executive director of the Iowa/Nebraska Primary Care Association, and Fort Dodge Mayor Terry Lutz.

The program, called “A Healthier Fort Dodge Starts Here,” is part of a nationwide push by the CMS to advocate preventive health and publicize preventive Medicare benefits that went into effect in 2005.