



# HHS boss visits Q-C to celebrate new dental facility

By Ed Tibbetts

Each day at Community Health Care Inc., about a dozen people wait, in pain, to get emergency dental care.

However, with the expansion of CHC's dental facility at 125 Scott St., Davenport, dentists at the clinic hope things will change for the better.

With more capacity to provide preventive care, the number of people waiting, while hurting, for emergency care hopefully will decline, they say.

"This is really exciting," said Mary Mariani, CHC's dental director.

There was another reason for excitement at the clinic on Wednesday.

A top Bush administration official was on hand to observe National Health Center Week and congratulate CHC officials for the expanded dental facilities, which have been open for about a week.

Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt said the new dental center is an example of a bipartisan effort to boost the number of community health centers in the United States.

"Every American needs a medical home," he added.

President Bush made it a goal to open or expand community health centers in 1,200 communities, and, Leavitt said, the number is at "900 and growing rapidly."

"We're going to get there."

Community health centers such as the one in the Quad-Cities offer services to a lower-income population. CHC has been operating in the Quad-Cities since 1975.

Leavitt was joined by U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and U.S. Food and Drug Administrator Andrew von Eschenbach.

Harkin, who sits on a key funding committee for health centers, called the addition "a much-needed and much-welcome addition." Harkin has been a fervent backer of the centers.

"Certainly, no child should be denied these services in our society," he said.

Harkin also credited the Republican president as "one of the best champions of community health centers."

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The additional dental capacity will allow 800 new visits per year, according to CHC chief executive George Barton.

Two new dentists have been hired as well.

Officials at the clinic say that providing good oral health is a key in many ways, including fighting diabetes. "Oral care is part of health care," Mariani said.

In addition to marking the opening, Harkin, Leavitt and von Eschenbach took a tour of the facility. The new quarters includes some administrative space. It cost \$2.6 million to build.

CHC has 26,000 patients and had 92,000 visits last year. It has five locations in the Quad-Cities.

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