

## Community Health Centers Celebrate Next Week

**BY IVY MOORE**

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Community Health Care Centers across the country observe National Community Health Centers Week Sunday through Saturday with the theme “Celebrating America’s Health Center: Serving Locally, Leading Nationally.” There are 143 of the centers in South Carolina serving almost 300,000 people. In Sumter, Clarendon and Lee counties, there are six CHCs providing care to anyone who needs it, regardless of ability to pay.

Sandhills Medical Foundation Inc. and the Sumter Family Health Center in Sumter are taking advantage of the weeklong observance to let people know what they and other community health centers do. Community health centers are staffed by board-certified doctors and other clinical personnel, including social workers, pharmacists, nurses and more. Of primary concern to many people is the cost of health care, and that’s an issue community health centers address as well, Sandhills medical case manager Bonetta Graves said.

“Community health centers have for a long time provided services that are equal to or greater than the quality of care provided at other, often more expensive provider types,” she said. “We wish to make care available to everyone in the community.”

Warren Hix, director of Sandhills Medical Foundation Inc. in South Carolina, said the center’s four sites are nonprofit, like all community health centers affiliated with the National Association of Community Health Centers.

“What that does is allow us to apply for a federal grant so that we are able to provide care to people irrespective of their ability to pay,” he said, “so we’re able to give the same care to someone who is indigent that we give to someone who has Medicare or Medicaid ... or if Bill Gates comes in here, he’ll get the same care, he’ll just pay cash.” Like all CHCs, Sandhills will serve anyone, even walk-ins, “as long as they aren’t rude, mean or threatening,” Hix said. “It’s not restricted to geopolitical lines. If someone came here from another county, we’d treat them. We receive federal dollars, but we’re private not-for-profit, so in some ways the best of both worlds. We have a public interest, but we have the flexibility or freedom of being private. But the federal dollars count for about 10 percent of our budget; the rest we have to earn.”

Community health centers accept a wide variety of insurance, including Medicare and Medicaid, but for those who have none, they operate on a sliding scale, so that each patient pays according to his ability.

During National Community Health Center Week, Sandhills will have a drawing and several giveaways “for customer appreciation for our patients,” Graves said.

Holly Chase, director of community development for Sumter Family Health Center, said SFHC

is taking advantage of National Health Center Week “to educate the public about who SFHC is and what services are provided. I will be going out talking to some civic groups, and we are participating in a big health care event in Columbia. ... “ She said the center provides free blood pressure checks and other health services out in the community “throughout the year at different events and will continue to do those.”

National Health Center Week highlights the more than 45-year record of health centers in providing affordable, high quality, cost-effective health care to all people, regardless of ability to pay.

National Health Center Week 2011 also provides an opportunity to focus on the progress we have made toward fulfilling the goal of our “Access for All America” plan to provide a health care home to 30 million patients by 2015. America’s Health Centers now serve over more than 20 million people (including 925,000 farm workers and nearly 940,000 people who are homeless) in 7,000 communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Guam.

## **LOCAL CENTERS**

The six Community Health Centers in the tri-county area are:

- Sandhills Medical Foundation Inc.  
425 N. Salem Ave. Sumter  
(803) 778-2442
- Sumter Family Health Center  
1278 N. Lafayette Drive Sumter  
(803) 774-4500
- Sumter Family Health Center  
Pinewood 25 E. Clark St. Pinewood  
(803) 774-4501
- Black River Health Care  
12 W. South St. Manning  
(803) 433-4321
- CareSouth-Carolina Bishopville Center  
545 Sumter Highway Bishopville  
(803) 484-5317
- CSC Bishopville II Center  
106 Hospital Square Bishopville  
(803) 484-5943

## **ON THE NET**

**Find more information about the week’s events.**

[www.healthcenterweek.org](http://www.healthcenterweek.org)