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Open house draws Member of Congress and other officials

Prospect Hill – U.S. Rep. Mark Walker toured Prospect Hill Community Health Center on Tuesday and talked health care with officials from area community health centers and local EMS representatives. “I don’t think people quite understand the immensity of a U.S. Congressman visiting,” said Brian Toomey, CEO of Piedmont Health, which operates Prospect Hill and nine other community health centers in central North Carolina. “He actually represents over three quarters of a million people. The fact that he is willing to come and be with us, we’re honored.”

Walker heard a lot of information from representatives of community health centers, which get a portion of their operating revenue from federal funds. Walker also took a tour of Prospect Hill’s facilities, including the new breast feeding room that allows doctors to continue working during pregnancies, as well as the facility’s dental offices and pharmacy.

“I have been very impressed with the level of care patients receive at community health centers,” said Walker. “And you also save us money in medical care costs and keep some of the more conservative members of Congress from filling up my Facebook pages,” he joked.

The congressman heard about the difficulties with getting veterans enrolled in community health programs because of paperwork involved in the Veterans Choice program, an initiative designed to get veterans medical care in facilities other than the V.A. Hospitals because of the backlogs in those facilities. Walker said he was aware of the problems and had a cadre of caring individuals on his staff who were working for a solution to it.

“I don’t think we’ve been able to enroll a veteran yet,” said Toomey.

Walker said Toomey’s visits to Washington were fruitful because he knows how the political process works and that it helps having knowledgeable people advocate for the needs of community health centers.

Walker heard from Caswell County EMS about the need for Homeland Security funding for emergency management offices in rural counties. A bill now working its way through Congress would cut \$6 million as well as a 50 percent match for EMS operations from current funding. Brad Jackson from Caswell County EMS said losing the match funds would be devastating to emergency management.

Jackson also said Piedmont’s new telemedicine plan implemented by EMS and Piedmont’s partner Rely M.D. saves thousands of dollars in emergency services, preventing people from having to go to an emergency room or hospital. Doctor visits can be done during lunch hours, saving people time and money, Jackson said.

He said it was crucial that House Bill 288 be passed to cover telemedicine on insurance policies.

The congressman heard from Margaret Smith, a patient at Prospect Hill, who read a poem about her experience with medical care at Prospect Hill. Smith, 89, a resident of Yanceyville, said she loves her doctor, Evan Ashkin.

"I love it because of the care I get," she said. "I don't have to wait a long time. If I'm depressed when I go in, Dr. Ashkin has me leaving laughing. It's affordable, too."

Piedmont Health, located in Carrboro, operates 10 community health centers in central North Carolina, is dedicated to providing high-quality, affordable and comprehensive primary care to improve the health and well-being of the community. Piedmont also operates two Programs of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly, in Burlington and Pittsboro. For more information, call (919) 933-8494 or visit www.piedmonthhealth.org.