

including notably for women. These enhancements include our commitment to maintain prenatal and postpartum services for women, as well as to expand critical women's health services at Windham. In addition, we are recruiting physicians and ancillary providers, and investing in state-of-the-art technology, that will serve all members of the Windham community. Finally, we are keenly aware of the issues faced by minorities and underrepresented individuals and are continuously striving to advance the causes of health equity and improve health outcomes for all members of our community.

Investments in Women's Health

There is a tremendous amount of misinformation in the Windham community around our plans for Women's Health Services. I have heard repeatedly in various public forums that Windham is doing away with Women's Health Services altogether and creating a "health desert" for women and underserved members of our community. This could not be further from the truth.

First and foremost, it is critically important that the community and OHS understand that Windham is committed to maintaining its prenatal clinic and postpartum services for women. You heard Dr. Rodis testify to the necessity of these services, particularly in a community with a significant number of underserved women who lack means to travel outside of the area for routine prenatal visits. These visits (approximately 10 during a typical pregnancy) comprise the majority of pregnancy-related health visits. Having these services available locally will help to ensure that women are compliant in obtaining regular prenatal care, with the goal of delivering a healthy baby at term. In addition, we are committed to maintaining and enhancing postpartum

services including lactation consulting and diabetes management and providing these services (prenatal and postpartum) in a culturally competent manner.

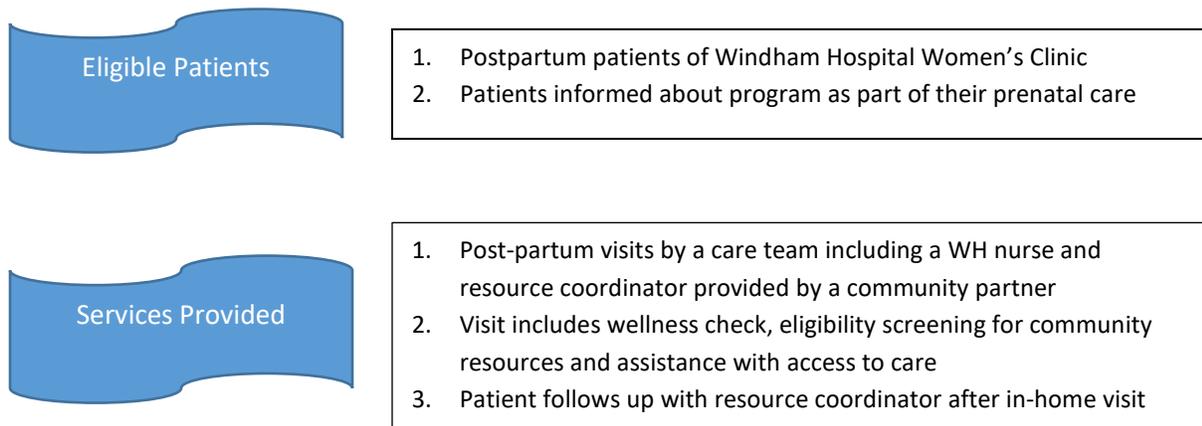
In addition, in September of 2020 HHC created the position of Regional Director of Women's Health Services for the East Region. The goal of Women's Health Services is to ensure the delivery of equitable, comprehensive, coordinated, and compassionate care to women across medical specialties and spanning the course of their lifetimes. Windham has also added a bilingual Advanced Practice Registered Nurse at the Women's Health Clinic to help ensure proper communication and to make women for whom English is a second language more comfortable obtaining treatment. Moreover, Windham is partnering with the Thames Valley Council for Community Action to fund a social worker position at the Women's Health Clinic. We also upgraded all of Windham's mammography equipment to the latest 3D technology, added an all-purpose ultrasound machine to our Mansfield Ledgebrook location that will provide breast and abdominal ultrasounds for women, and ordered a new ultrasound for the Women's Health Clinic.

We have also established the Healthy Beginnings program, a postpartum visiting nurse/community health resources program. The Healthy Beginnings program involves mobile postpartum visits for patients of the Hospital's Women's Health Clinic. An HHC-affiliated nurse and community resource coordinator visit patients at their home or location of preference to help connect them to community resources and access to care. While the Women's Health Clinic provides comprehensive prenatal and postpartum clinical services, there is an opportunity to provide patients with in-home or virtual postpartum visits modeled after other best practice programs around the country. These additional services will improve health outcomes for both mom and baby. As of October 12, 2021, we have seen three (3) new mothers and have

scheduled 4 home visits. We have seven (7) patients scheduled for the month of December, two (2) of which are Spanish speaking, two (2) are Quiche' speaking and three (3) are English speaking. Two (2) patients are scheduled for January 2022 and several follow up assessments have been scheduled. We have executed a MOU with the Health Education Center for community health worker resources and medical translation services. Provided below is a link to a recent article on the Health Beginnings Program along with a short video about the programs' first patient.

<https://healthnewshub.org/healthy-beginnings-and-promising-futures-for-new-moms-in-windham-region/>

Additional information on the Healthy Beginnings program and how it operates:



In addition, HHC has recruited physicians in the subspecialties of urogynecology and gynecologic oncology, which will allow women to access these services regionally. Dr. Anna Pilzek and Dr. Amy Kirkpatrick Brown joined Hartford HealthCare Medical Group recently and their services will be available to women throughout Eastern Connecticut.

HHC is also up-skilling and upscaling the birthing center at Backus to a Level II Neonatal Intensive Care Unit ("NICU") (a/k/a Special Care Nursery), including hiring a Medical

Director and additional training of obstetric nurses. This enhanced quality of neonatal services at Backus will be of tremendous benefit to women from Windham who choose to deliver their babies at that hospital and find themselves in need of these critically important services. It is important to note that 89% of Windham Women Health Clinic Patients deliver at Backus Hospital. Backus has also been recognized as a Baby-Friendly® Hospital through the joint WHO-UNICEF Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (“BFHI”). The BFHI recognizes hospitals and maternity centers that demonstrate their commitment to providing a positive environment for breastfeeding mothers, fully informing mothers of the importance of breastfeeding and helping them decide how best to feed their babies. In addition, Backus was recently named the most socially responsible hospital in Connecticut by the Lown Institute, a healthcare think-tank that measures hospitals across categories including equity, value, and outcomes. Metrics used by the Lown Institute include inclusivity, pay equity, avoiding overuse, and clinical outcomes, as well as cost-efficiency.

Investments in and Additional Services Provided by Windham Hospital/HHC East Region

In addition to our substantial investments in Women’s Health Services, and in response to the community need for specialty physicians and providers, Windham has recruited and added nine (9) new providers in last 18 months, five (5) of whom are women. These include:

- Primary Care – Dr. Gregory Haman 2020, Dr. Jennifer Bellino 2021, Dr. Judith Ukabam 2021, Tammy Gendron, PA 2021
- Heart and Vascular Institute – James Quaicoe, APRN 2020
- Oncology – Dr. Pallvi Popli 2020
- General Surgery – Dr. Robert McCallum 2020
- Surgical Oncology (and Breast Surgeon) – Dr. Huseyin Aydin 2020
- Pulmonology – Dr. Dilpreet Kaur 2020

Windham partnered with The Center for Bone & Joint Care, Orthopedic Associates of Windham County in 2017. This brought on three (3) additional orthopedic surgeons, including a spine surgeon and two (2) general orthopedists, to Windham who have office hours on site at the 5 Founders Street building and do surgeries at the Hospital, including general orthopedics, joint replacement, and hand surgery. Spine surgery specifically was not available at Windham until this partnership and previously, there was only one (1) orthopedist who did procedures at Windham.

Windham has also purchased new SPECT-CT nuclear imaging technology and acquired surgical robotics: Globus (2019) and Mako (2017). The Hospital opened a cancer infusion center at Windham in 2018 and has plans to renovate and expand cardiopulmonary rehabilitation space. Windham also hired new management for its sleep center and wound care center, resulting in programmatic improvements to both services.

Windham has also been at the forefront of COVID-19 community testing and vaccination clinics. The Hospital has partnered with local health districts to operate community vaccine clinics at various locations including Windham Heights, Foster Drive, and Pride's Corner. As of October 19, 2021, approximately 12,000 individuals have been vaccinated by Windham Hospital and over 50,000 in total throughout the East Region. There have been more than 46,000 COVID tests administered from June 2020 to July 2021. In addition, the Hospital is sharing COVID data with Generations Family Health Center for care coordination.

Moreover, HHC established an East Region Department of Community Health and added a new community health nurse. The Community Health Department in the East Region is dedicated to education, creation and implementation of hands-on grass-roots initiatives that will

have a positive impact on the overall health of our communities. The Department includes a full-time manager and community health nurse to support the needs of the community.

In addition, the Rx for Health program, which celebrated its 10th anniversary at Backus Hospital last year, has been expanded to Windham. Rx for Health provides nutritionally at-risk families with “prescriptions” for fresh produce that come from their doctor or other healthcare provider. In the Norwich area, the vouchers can be redeemed for fresh fruits and vegetables at the weekly Farmers Market at Howard T. Brown Memorial Park. In Windham, the program will be available at the Willimantic Food Co-op, the Willimantic Farmers Market and the new Windham Hospital Farmstand. Each “prescription” is worth \$126. Windham has partnered with Generations Family Health Center in Willimantic to promote the program and recruit families to use it. Casey Squier, engagement services manager for Generations, said 20 families will be identified by the organization’s staff pediatrician to receive the vouchers. The expansion into Windham was made possible by a donation to the program by the Windham Hospital Foundation.

Furthermore, the HHC East Region Community Health Department is in the planning process for a “Healthy Cooking” initiative that will be implemented in Windham County. This initiative is a partnership between Windham Hospital Nutrition, Diabetes and Food services departments and the Community Health Department alongside CLICK kitchen. The idea is to identify individuals who would benefit from learning about meal preparation techniques and menu planning to assist with a diabetes diagnosis. Windham Hospital food services director and chef teaches individuals how to prepare 4 separate meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner, party snacks). Each session is held at CLICK, a local teaching kitchen in the town of Windham. Participants cook the meals and then can bring these meals home to share with their

families. Participants not only learn kitchen and meal preparation skills but are educated about choosing foods that are best suited for their diagnosis and how to maximize foods and meal planning based on a limited budget. The hope is that the initiative will have a positive effect not only on clinical measures (A1c, BMI, etc.) but subjective measures as well such as how often families are consuming fast food and how often families are sitting down to eat meals together.

Windham provides more than \$1.6 million in community benefits each year, touching more than 10,000 individuals through programs and care focusing on health issues like cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation, diabetes education, and more. Windham also supports uninsured and underinsured patients in financial need with close to \$1.4 million in financial assistance provided each year.

You will hear in the public comment portion of the hearing this afternoon that Windham Hospital is closing; that is simply not true. Based on the foregoing, it is apparent that Windham Hospital is not closing, but rather that the Hospital is committed to the Windham community and is making every effort to improve and enhance equitable access to, and the quality of, healthcare for area residents. You will also hear that closure of the Windham OB service discriminates against women of color, those with Medicaid and the uninsured; this is not true either. As you heard from the clinicians that testified before me, the closure of Windham's OB service and the transition of women from the Windham Women's Health Clinic to hospitals that are better equipped to handle unexpected emergencies during childbirth actually enhances the safety of minority and underserved women who are at greater risk for conditions that result in complications of pregnancy and childbirth.

Conclusion

The investments that Windham Hospital is making in healthcare services to benefit the local community is a testament to our commitment to keeping the Hospital as a vital community healthcare resource. While we had to make the difficult decision to terminate obstetric services to ensure the health and safety of women and their babies, we will continue to provide exceptional prenatal and postpartum care to these same women and children once they have safely delivered at Backus or the hospital of their choosing. We have also worked tirelessly to recruit physicians and make enhancements to Women's Health Services, which will benefit these women throughout their lives. This is in addition to enhancements to health services and technology that will benefit all members of the Windham community.

For the reasons discussed here today, I urge OHS to approve our CON request to terminate Windham obstetrics labor and delivery services. I am available to answer any questions that you have.

By: Donna Handley
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