



Yoga on stage

Audience members can participate in a new play about a yoga instructor. See Arts + Leisure.



Family ties

The new Eagle field hockey coach is taking over the successful team from her mother. See Page 1B.



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Mobile health center to set up at Mt. Abe

By MARIN HOWELL

BRISTOL — Bristol's Mountain Health Center, the Body Online Lab at Middlebury College and the Mount Abraham Unified School District are joining forces this fall to launch a school-based health center for students in the 5-Town area. The fruits of this collaboration include the creation of a mobile health care unit at Mount Abraham Union High School that will offer students primary health care services one day a week starting later this month.

Kristin Bright is a professor of medical anthropology and public health at Middlebury College who leads the Body Online Lab. She helped organize this initiative, and, in doing so, hopes to address the rise in student absenteeism, which has continued to become more frequent during the pandemic.

"We were really quite concerned about the kids and making sure that overall, they could get health care on site, because there's a very strong link between absenteeism
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Health center

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and health care in this country. If you can provide care on site at a school, it's more likely that students will get those health care needs met and will have continuity of care as well," Bright said.

Bright, a Middlebury Union High School alum, also feels strongly about meeting the needs of those in her home county.

"For me, it's a personal dream — growing up in the 1980s, not seeing a lot of that and knowing that my peers at Mount Abe, who I now work with, say the same thing," she said. "I knew that school-based health centers could provide so much that we had missed in the 1980s and '90s."

Bright found willing partners for this effort in the Mountain Health Center and the MAUSD, as both entities were also looking for ways to meet the health care needs of adolescents in the area.

"As a community health center, central to our mission is building community partnerships and identifying where there are opportunities to meet unmet health care needs," said Lindsay White, a nurse practitioner at Mountain Health Center. "Bringing health services to the schools can help kids stay in schools and hopefully reverse the trend of the last few years where kids have been so fragmented in terms of their attendance."

The mobile health care unit will be located outside of the Mount Abraham Union Middle/High School building beginning in mid-September and will operate on Wednesdays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Clinicians from Mountain Health Center will staff the mobile clinic and provide services such as:

- Assessment of and treatment for acute illnesses including ear infections, strep throat, influenza and rashes.

- Care coordination for chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, etc.

- Management of musculoskeletal and sports injuries.

- Laboratory testing such as for strep throat, mono, flu, urinalysis, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

- Sexual and reproductive health services.

- Wellness counseling on topics such as exercise, healthy eating, substance use, sexual health and mental health.

- Sports physicals.

Students don't have to be patients at Mountain Health Center to be eligible for these services, as all Mount Abe parents will receive an informational mailing about the school-based health center and can choose to register their child for these services. Once registered, students can be signed up for appointments through Mount Abe's health office.

Insurance will be billed for these services when appropriate, and students without health insurance are eligible for Mountain Health Center's sliding scale fee.

The mobile health care unit is intended to support the school's nurses as well.

"I see it as strengthening the partnership between the nurses and medical care that the students get," White said. "I think it will lead to less fragmented care for the nurses and streamline communication with the health care providers."

Bright said this collaboration hopes to develop further support for the district's nurses down the road, in part by creating a digital student health information system.

"The nurses can't do what they do and do it well unless they have infrastructure, particularly digital health information management, and they don't have any digitized records at this moment," she said.

Future initiatives of this school-based health center could also include offering dental services at other schools in the district or providing mental health support for students, though the implementation of additional offerings will be guided by student needs that are identified.