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NEWS RELEASE

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UM'S HEALTH CENTER SCORES WITH ACCREDITATION TEAM

MISSOULA --

The University of Montana's Curry Health Center learned this week that the national Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care has granted it full accreditation for three years based on its high level of compliance with association standards.

Three years is AAAHC's highest mark. Less successful facilities may receive accreditation for only six months or one year.

"Your organization is to be commended for this accomplishment," wrote association President William H. Beeson in his congratulatory letter to Dr. Nancy Fitch, director of Curry Health Services. "Granting accreditation reflects our confidence, based on evidence from your recent survey, that you meet, and will continue to demonstrate throughout the accreditation term, the attributes of an accreditable organization."

The attributes Beeson refers to relate to quality of care, quality management, clinical records, surgical and pharmaceutical services, environmental safety, governance, administration and professional development.

This is the health center's first attempt at accreditation, a voluntary process that helps an organization measure the quality of its services and performance against national standards.

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CurryHS.rl--2

It involves a laborious self-assessment by the organization and a thorough review by expert surveyors.

"The accreditation process looks closely for weaknesses and areas of potential mistakes," Fitch said. "The self-study process has helped Curry Health Center to identify areas where normal operating mechanisms might fail and create safeguards. We are gratified that AAAHC gave us this recognition."

Hospitals have been accredited for many years, she said, but ambulatory health care facilities have only recently sought accreditation.

"One reason ambulatory care facilities are seeking accreditation is that managed care is requiring that organizations prove or document their quality via accreditation," she said.

AAAHC accredits at least 20 kinds of ambulatory health care organizations, including health maintenance organizations, birthing centers, dental group practices, Indian health centers and pain management clinics.

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