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May 24, 2012

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North Country ACO to participate as a Medicare Shared Savings Program Accountable Care Organization.

Voluntary, New Care Coordination Program Created to Offer High Quality Service and Care to Beneficiaries Through Partnership with Medicare

Littleton -North Country Accountable Care Organization has been selected to participate in the Medicare Shared Savings Program (Shared Savings Program) Accountable Care Organization (ACO), a multifaceted new program sponsored by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

Through the Shared Savings Program, North Country ACO will work with CMS to provide Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries with high quality service and care, while reducing the growth in Medicare expenditures through enhanced care coordination.

Sharon Beaty, President of North Country ACO Board, states that the organization is extremely pleased to partner with The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services in its innovative approach to improving care for Medicare beneficiaries.

The Shared Savings Program will reward ACOs that lower the rate of growth in health care costs for Medicare beneficiaries while meeting performance standards on quality of care and putting patients first. ACOs are groups of doctors and other health care providers working together to provide high quality service and care for their patients. Provider participation in an ACO is purely voluntary and Medicare beneficiaries retain their current ability to seek treatment from any provider they wish.

CMS will use robust quality measures to reward ACOs, including North Country ACO, for providing Medicare beneficiaries with a positive patient experience and better health outcomes, while also reducing growth in Medicare expenditures for the same patient population.

"Accountable Care Organizations will improve coordination and communication among physicians and other providers which will help improve care and lower costs for Medicare beneficiaries," said Marilyn B. Tavenner, acting administrator of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. "We are excited to welcome North Country ACO as a partner with Medicare and look forward to working with them to improve care for Medicare beneficiaries in New Hampshire."

Under the Shared Savings Program, 27 ACOs have entered into agreements with Medicare to take responsibility for the quality of care furnished to individual beneficiaries in return for the opportunity to share in any savings with the Medicare program for improved care.

The Shared Savings Program was created as part of the Affordable Care Act, the health care reform law of 2010, to better coordinate care for Medicare patients through ACOs. Instead of

patients having to navigate the complex health system on their own, these ACOs will work hand-in-hand with patients to ensure patients do not slip through the cracks. ACOs will encourage providers to work more closely together than ever before and offer incentives to providers that better coordinate a patient's care and treat patients across care settings—including doctors' offices, hospitals, and other health care settings. The Shared Savings Program is not a Medicare Advantage plan or an HMO. Beneficiaries with fee-for-service Medicare will still have the right to use any doctor or hospital who accepts Medicare, at any time.

In addition to participation in the Shared Savings Program, North Country ACO has also been selected to participate in the Advance Payment Model. Through the Advance Payment Model, North Country ACO will receive additional access to capital that can be used to invest in infrastructure supporting care coordination, including staff or electronic health records. These funds will be recouped over time through future shared savings.

This announcement is the culmination of a comprehensive selection process that began in the fall of 2011 with the national release of the Medicare Shared Savings Program application by CMS. North Country ACO was selected based on rigorous eligibility criteria and program requirements.

About North Country ACO: North Country Accountable Care Organization (North Country ACO) is located in Littleton New Hampshire. North Country ACO is dedicated to promoting better care coordination, improving patient outcomes and creating a collaborative environment across healthcare systems in rural northern New Hampshire. The success of the ACO model in improving health, healthcare, and reducing costs is contingent on providing the right care at the right time in the right setting. Participants of the North Country ACO include the following health centers: Ammonoosuc Community Health Services, Coos County Family Health Services, Indian Stream Health Center and Mid-State Health Center. All of the North Country ACO participants are members of North Country Health Consortium (NCHC). The community health centers have relationships with each other, as well as strong associations with their community partners. The collaboration and coordination among community partners results in smooth transitions of care for patients. Many of the community partners are also members of NCHC, including community hospitals, home health agencies, community mental health centers, and emergency medical services. Collaboration through this long-standing, unique rural network provides critical opportunities for coordination which result in reduced hospital re-admissions and emergency department use, and improved health outcomes. For more information contact ACO Executive Director, Nancy Frank at 603-259-3700.

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