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PRESS RELEASE

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UHS provides four-star care, survey reports

AMHERST, Mass. – University Health Services (UHS) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst offers four-star care in a number of areas which matter most to patients, according to a new survey released today by Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP), a coalition of health leaders working together to promote improvements in the quality of health care services in the state.

The statewide MHQP survey of patient experiences took place from July through September, 2005 and examined nine aspects of care key to patient satisfaction. Four measures focus on the doctor/patient relationship: communication, integration of care, knowledge of the patient and health promotion. Four others assess the organization itself, ranking access, continuity, the clinical team and the office staff. The final measure – a patient's willingness to recommend the organization to others – offers a global view. MHQP assigns a ranking of one to four stars to each measure, helping consumers easily assess and compare provider results.

UHS patients were highly likely to recommend the organization to others, resulting in a four-star rating. All of the physician-related measures earned four stars, as did UHS' clinical team and office staff. The practice's three-star ranking for continuity of care was also above the statewide average. Access-related questions included appointment scheduling and wait times; UHS received a two-star ranking, which was statistically equivalent to the statewide benchmark.

"The survey results help us better understand what's important to patients and how we're performing," said Bernette A. Melby, Executive Director, UHS. "Our ongoing quality improvement efforts appear to be effective, as evidenced by the four-star ratings for many of the measures. I want to thank all the UHS patients who took the time to share their experiences."

UHS' internal quality improvement processes had previously identified access issues, a finding supported by MHQP results close to statewide averages, but below UHS' other ratings. Even before the survey data's release, new efforts were underway. "UHS is piloting an open access model on a limited basis; recent feedback from patients indicates this is improving provider availability and accessibility," Melby said.

The survey encompassed 497 practices statewide, representing 92% of registered primary care physicians with 50 or more patients across the MHQP's five member health plans – Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts; Fallon Community Health Plan; Health New England; Harvard Pilgrim Health Care; and Tufts Health Plan. More information about the survey is available on the MHQP web site, www.mhqp.org.

UHS, UMass Amherst's fully accredited health center, serves students, faculty and staff, offering comprehensive care and referral services with a special focus on the health needs and concerns of students. For more information, call (413) 577-5000.

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INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY:

- Bernette A. Melby, Executive Director, University Health Services