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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AVMF Launches New Referral Program and Crisis Team

The Aspen Valley Medical Foundation today announces the establishment of the Aspen Hope Center, a referral center designed to meet the community's needs for quick and easy access to mental health services. **Calls are taken at 925-5858, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** This Aspen Hopeline (referral and crisis hot line) provides an **assessment** and **triage** by a professionally trained staff of clinicians. Referrals are made to local private mental health practitioners and/or local health and human service agencies depending on the specific needs of the caller. If someone is in crisis, a mobile crisis team is activated to respond immediately and personally to the caller in need.

The professional staff of the Aspen Hope Center consists of Jonathan Birnkrant, MD, Medical Director; and Callie Henry, MSW; Michelle Muething, MA; and Laura Smith, LCSW, clinicians. Other part time staff members include Mary Catherine LaMar; Medford Leake, MA; Carrie Marsh and Julie Wagner. The organization is currently a service of the Aspen Valley Medical Foundation, but will evolve into an independent non-profit organization in the future. Offices are currently in the Aspen Airport Business Center.

The idea for the Aspen Hope Center came from recommendations made by a research study commissioned by the Aspen Valley Medical Foundation last year. The study was conducted by the University of Colorado Denver Depression Center and the recommendations were made public in December 2009. The purpose of the study was to assess the mental health needs in Aspen and Pitkin County and determine evidence-based ways to meet those needs. The most important recommendations called for a central access point for finding the right services for people with mental health needs, a mobile crisis team and comprehensive community educational programs for suicide prevention and mental health issues.

The Depression Center staff and the Aspen Hope Center staff have collaborated during the formation of the Hope Center with clinical protocol development, research, and program development. A series of Suicide Prevention Trainings will be conducted starting this summer. Such trainings were offered to local first responders last year while the Mental Health Needs Assessment was conducted as a response to the requests from the Aspen Public Safety Council. Plans to expand those trainings to the entire community are well underway.

Funding for the new Aspen Hope Center is coming initially from the Aspen Valley Medical Foundation. The Center will be supported in the future by philanthropic individuals and foundations. For further information, contact Kris Marsh , kmarsh@avmfaspden.org or 970-544-1377 or call the Aspen Hope Center, 970-925-5858.