

Editorial

High hopes for Holy Cross changes

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Holy Cross Hospital is now a federally designated critical access facility, which changes the way Medicare patients will be billed. We are cautiously optimistic that this new designation will make the hospital more financially stable without reducing patient care.

Time will tell if the designation is as good for Holy Cross financially as hospital officials believe it will be. Some of that will depend on factors out of the hospital administration's and board's control, such as what Republicans in Congress do with the Affordable Care Act.

Holy Cross' designation as a critical access hospital will mean Medicare patients pay more than in the past for services, according to hospital officials. Most of those additional costs will be covered if the patient has secondary insurance, such as AARP. About 300 patients a year won't have secondary insurance and hospital officials say they are prepared to help them with financial aid.

Whatever happens, no patient will be kicked out and left in the cold or released before they should be, according to hospital CEO Bill Patten.

Holy Cross is a critical service for Taos, one the community is lucky to have, as many rural areas lack any hospital or clinic. The voters believed enough in the hospital to pass a mill levy that will provide millions to Taos Health Systems for improvements to the Holy Cross Hospital facility.

Now hospital administrators are asking the community to trust them again with this shift to a critical access hospital. Patten and the board made some good moves in seeking the designation – such as hosting meetings to educate the public and taking teams of medical staff to other critical access hospitals to see how they operate.

Patten has said it will take a few years to see the full financial benefit of the new critical access designation. As the hospital heads toward financial stability, we believe the additional revenue should be spent not only on improving the hospital's facilities, but also on higher pay for staff. Rural hospitals already struggle to attract and retain doctors, nurses and other specialists. Higher pay would help.

We hope the hospital is successful in this new critical access endeavor.

And we hope the hospital will remain open and transparent about the outcome.

