

Accreditation Commission for Health Care on the Way to National Award *Achieving the Commitment Level of NCAfE is Part of the Journey*

RALEIGH – Quality is the business of the Accreditation Commission for Health Care (ACHC) in Raleigh, so it was natural for them to establish an ISO certified quality management system and then strive for national recognition through the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.

Their quality management system received ISO 9001:2000 certification in 2004, and ACHC will be recognized for achieving the commitment level of the North Carolina Awards for Excellence (NCAfE) on September 17, 2009 at the Management Systems Summit awards luncheon in Raleigh. NCAfE is administered by the North Carolina State University Industrial Extension Service, and has established four levels, or steps, to achieving the national Baldrige award: involvement, commitment, advancement and leadership.

ACHC leadership has prominently framed and posted their next BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal): become a national Baldrige recipient by 2015. The organizations that receive this honor have met rigorous criteria that have been benchmarked against the best performing organizations.

ACHC monitors quality through standards for organizations across the country that provide health care products or services delivered primarily in the home, such as home medical equipment, hospice and private duty providers. They began their internal quality journey by achieving ISO system certification in 2004 (current certification is ISO 9001:2008). They were, in fact, the first health care accreditation organization with a quality management system certified to ISO, which earned them national coverage in several quality magazines.

“Going for the Baldrige was the next logical step,” said Tom Cesar, ACHC president. “It’s more than process management. It’s total organizational alignment to performance excellence.”

“ISO was a beginning,” said Leslie Knuth, vice president of quality assurance. “It was good for us at the time,” she said. “ISO forced us to become more consistent with respect to our documentation and processes. Baldrige leads us to think not just about customer needs, but also about the requirements of our partners, stakeholders and others. Taking this broader perspective will make ACHC a more sustainable organization.”

ACHC was incorporated in 1986 in North Carolina to provide accreditation for home health care aide services within the state. A decade later, ACHC expanded to serve the entire country. “ACHC’s mission is to improve health care delivery,” Cesar said. “Although ACHC is not a health care provider, it helps those who are providers to do a better job.”

At a strategic planning retreat in April 2008, the ACHC board voted on their new BHAG. Less than a year later, they submitted their application to NCAfE. Through those intense months, Knuth said she received information and encouragement from ACHC board members, the NC Board of Nursing (also an NCAfE recipient), as well as NCAfE staff.

The Baldrige process requires critical self-assessment. One measurement is how well an organization shares its values with employees and with customers. ACHC believes the service every employee provides must truly demonstrate its values – and this is what customers should expect.

Since going through the Baldrige process, recruiting now includes making sure potential employees understand ACHC's mission and values and are willing to work in teams. "We share values early in the hiring process to make sure we get the right people on board," Cesar said. He expects the 30-plus person staff to grow along with demand for their services.

"What we do is quality monitoring," Cesar said. "This (Baldrige) is the answer to the question: So who accredits the accreditors? And it helps us improve."

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