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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Medical Program Strengthens Heritage University's Commitment to Improving Rural Health Care in the Pacific Northwest

Toppenish, WA – Heritage University's efforts to improve health care in the Yakima Valley took a big step today, as Heritage President Dr. John Bassett announced that the new Physician Assistant Educational program at Heritage received provisional accreditation from the physician assistant (PA) profession's national accrediting body, the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA).

"I am proud of the faculty and staff that have worked so hard to put this new Central Washington program together," says Dr. Bassett. "Our program may be new but we have a very experienced group of people ready to educate our future PA students. Linda Dale, our program director; Bill Hatch, our program academic coordinator; and Judy Hargis, our clinical coordinator have been in PA education for over 26 years, combined."

Heritage University's PA program will be the only such program offered in central Washington, and will provide a new resource for the improvement of health care in the Yakima Valley and rural areas of the Pacific Northwest. Physician assistants will work in medical teams under the supervision of a licensed physician and perform much of the same care as a doctor, such as diagnosing and treating illnesses, ordering lab tests, prescribing medications, and even assisting in surgeries.

Officials with Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences (PNWU) say Heritage University's new PA program will complement their own efforts to increase patient access to health care in the Yakima Valley.

"As a partner in medical education, PNWU is particularly supportive of new programs which support our interdisciplinary learning model through health sciences and student interaction. The PNWU community is excited about this program and the opportunity to collaborate," said PNWU President Keith Watson, DO.

The first class of 32 PA students at Heritage University will begin on May 16, 2014 and will graduate in May, 2016. At that time they will be eligible to take the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) board exam, which, when passed, will allow them to practice as a physician assistant in any state in the United States and in some foreign countries.

The Physician Assistant program joins the Nursing program and Medical Laboratory Science program at Heritage in the realm of health science related degree programs and demonstrates the University's commitment to provide degree offerings that reflect the needs of the community. "The University's leadership and Board of Directors are constantly evaluating the needs of our community and seeks to provide undergraduate and graduate degree programs that will lead to meaningful careers for our students and the betterment of our community," stated Heritage University Provost Curt Gualianone. "The new PA program accomplishes both of those goals and we could not be more excited to welcome the first incoming class."

For more information, contact Linda Dale, Director of Physician Assistant Program, (509) 865-0707 or dale_l@heritage.edu

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