

The following is a June 10, 2008 press release by Naomi Morrison, Community Relations at North Valley Hospital, Whitefish, MT:

The Sleep Medicine Center Receives Accreditation

Standards are important, and now The Sleep Medicine Center at North Valley Hospital has been honored with the highest standards in the valley with the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) accreditation. The Sleep Medicine Center in Kalispell has been accredited since 2004, so it was a natural process to follow through on accrediting the hospital services. The review board was so pleased with how the sleep center performed; they recommended full accreditation without any changes to the policies and procedures already in place.

"It says you're a center of excellence, and that you've been looked over," said Dr. Patrick J. Burns, AASM Board certified sleep specialist.

To acquire accreditation, an AASM Board certified sleep specialist is required to directly see, evaluate studies and follow up with each patient. Dr. Burns, who is the medical director of both sleep centers, is the only board-certified doctor who lives and practices in the valley. For accreditation, AASM also reviews the policy and procedures for everything from answering the phones to treatment of all disorders, not just sleep apnea.

Being accredited is great news for the area. It's more convenient for patients to have two locations to choose from. And, every year, more insurance companies are requiring sleep study centers to be accredited for payment. With five registered sleep technicians, one nurse practitioner who specializes in sleep medicine and a full-time day crew, patients can receive attention 24-hours a day.

Once you schedule an appointment, you can do a study and have results within three weeks. This includes the education process. At The Sleep Medicine Center, staff give patients a tour of the sleep lab and allow them to play with the machines prior to your study to help reduce anxiety.

"The patients we see are very educated about the process and how it helps them," Burns said.

It's important that the community understands sleep disorders. Many people know about Sleep Apnea, but other disorders also contribute to heart disease, high blood pressure and array of other medical issues.

"Sleep Apnea is not a cosmetic problem, it's a health problem," Burns said.