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### **September is Gynecological Cancer Awareness Month**

Approximately every 7 minutes a woman is diagnosed with gynecologic cancer. The American Cancer Society estimated that in 2008 more than 78,000 women in the United States would be diagnosed with some form of gynecological cancer. Greene County Family Planning hopes that women will learn what they can do to protect themselves and will also educate other women about this important health topic.

Gynecologic cancers are cancers of the female reproductive organs. These include the cervix, ovaries, uterus, fallopian tubes, vagina and vulva.

There are many risk factors associated with gynecological cancer including: family history, failure to receive regular Pap tests, menopause or advanced age, not bearing children, infertility, obesity, hypertension (high blood pressure), diabetes, unopposed estrogen use, tamoxifen use and high risk strains of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). Medical researchers

have found that almost all cervical cancers, and some vaginal and vulvar cancers, are caused by persistent infection with high risk strains of HPV. Some of the above risk factors can be reduced by lifestyle changes. For example, diet and exercise play a significant role in reducing a person's risk of obesity, hypertension and diabetes.

Warning signs and symptoms of a possible gynecologic cancer include unusual vaginal bleeding or discharge, a sore that does not heal in the vulvar/vaginal area, pain or pressure in the pelvic area, a persistent change in bowel or bladder habits, frequent indigestion or abdominal bloating, a thickening or lump in the vulvar/vaginal area that either causes pain or can be seen or felt. You should speak with your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms.

According to the Women's Cancer Network of the Gynecologic Cancer Foundation there are **4 THINGS YOU CAN DO** to maintain your gynecological health.

- Get to know your family history
- Conduct an online cancer risk assessment at [www.WCN.org](http://www.WCN.org)
- Ask questions; educate yourself about gynecologic cancers

- Make an appointment for your annual gynecologic exam and PAP test

You may also want to consider being vaccinated with Gardasil, the cervical cancer vaccine currently available to girls and young women age 9 to 26. Ask your healthcare provider about Gardasil, the only vaccine that helps protect against four types of HPV, two types that cause 70% of cervical cancer cases and two more types that cause 90% of genital warts cases. Be a powerful woman and follow the above suggestions. You will be on the road to taking charge of your reproductive health. You can easily accomplish the suggestions of asking about Gardasil and having your annual exam and PAP by calling Greene County Family Planning and scheduling a reproductive health exam.

Greene County Family Planning accepts most insurance plans including Medicaid. We are proud to say that we are helping many people who have recently lost their insurance due to job loss. We have a sliding fee scale for those without insurance. If you have no insurance you may be eligible for the Family Planning Benefit Program which would cover the full cost of your exam, lab tests, and even birth control. Our services are confidential. We also provide services to men. We are conveniently located on the third

floor of the Greene County Office Building at 411 Main Street, Catskill, NY.

Please call us at 518-719-3580 to make an appointment. We look forward

to meeting you!