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NEW NURSE MIDWIFE PROGRAM INTRODUCED FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

ORLANDO – The Orange County Health Department (OCHD) is recognizing National Women's Health Month this May by introducing its new Certified Nurse Midwife Program. The service, which is a first at the Orange County Health Department, has helped deliver at least 77 healthy babies at Health Central Hospital. The program has had a very low cesarean (C-section) rate of less than 10 percent for 2009 and a very low percentage of low birth weight babies. The midwife program began this past October as a partnership between Health Central Hospital and the health department to address infant mortality rates and the critical need for more health care workers to deliver babies, especially for underinsured or uninsured low risk pregnant women in West Orange County. The program is supported in part by a grant from the "100 Women Strong" *Giving Circle of the Community Foundation of Central Florida* and the *Orange County Healthy Start Coalition*.

The goal of National Women's Health Month is to encourage women to take simple steps to improve their health and the health of their children. This year's theme for Women's Health Month is *It's Your Time, Get Inspired, Get Healthy*. Besides certified nurse midwife services, the OCHD Women's Health Program provides prenatal care and family planning to women of child-bearing age. In fact, the health department is one of the largest prenatal care providers in the county.

"I would most definitely use a midwife for a future delivery. What helped me the most, while having my first baby, was that the nurse midwife kept reminding me to say calm," said one mother who recently delivered a baby girl under the care of the Orange County Health Department midwife program.

Family planning and baby spacing are an essential step in the decision of having a child and delivering a healthy baby. If a woman already has a child, waiting a two-year period in-between births gives the mother's body the opportunity to recover from a previous pregnancy.

There are many things a woman can do to have a healthy pregnancy and give her baby the best possible start, such as:

- Get a pregnancy test as soon as you think you are pregnant or if you miss your period.
- Begin prenatal care early and continue with regular visits throughout your pregnancy.
- Exercise regularly to help you feel better and prepare your body for pregnancy.
- Avoid smoking. First or second hand smoke can cause your baby to be born too early or too small.
- Do not use drugs and alcohol which can cause birth defects, mental retardation, miscarriage, brain damage, or even death to your baby.
- Take 400 mcg of folic acid each day. This can reduce the risk of serious birth defects to the brain and spine. Choose a multivitamin that includes 400 mcg of folic acid.
- Eat healthy foods and regular meals.
- Drink less caffeine.

Remember, the risk of birth defects and pregnancy problems can be reduced by making good health choices before and during pregnancy and by planning pregnancies when ready physically and emotionally.

For more information, contact the Orange County Health Department's Women's Health Services Program at 407-858-1400.

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