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**Women's Health Care Professionals Issue Warning
about Cesarean Section on Demand**

WASHINGTON (November 19, 2003) – The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' (ACOG) recently released opinion that deems physicians ethically justified to perform elective cesareans without a medical reason has caused alarm for major women's health organizations. The opinion may deny women access to fully informed consent regarding one of the most controversial obstetrical procedures. With a U.S. cesarean rate exceeding 26 percent, and no definitive study on the benefits of cesarean delivery, it is startling to give physicians the go-ahead to perform non-medically justified surgery on women with normal pregnancies.

A group of women's health care organizations, including Lamaze International, American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM), Doulas of North America (DONA), Coalition for Improving Maternity Services (CIMS) and the Association of Nurse Advocates for Childbirth Solutions (ANACS), believes this opinion downplays the risks to mother and baby when non-medically necessary cesareans are performed. "No evidence supports the idea that cesareans are as safe as vaginal births for mother or baby, and pregnant women should be given all of the facts they need to make an educated decision," said Barbara Hotelling, president of Lamaze International.

"The World Health Organization recommends no more than a 15 percent cesarean rate. With a million women having cesarean sections every year, this means that 400,000 to 500,000 may be unnecessary," warned CIMS Executive Director Rae Davis.

Research shows that the risk of maternal death following cesarean section is five to seven times higher than vaginal birth. Complications during and after the surgery may include injury to the bladder, uterus and blood vessels, hemorrhage, anesthesia accidents, blood clots in the legs, pulmonary embolism, paralyzed bowel and infection.

Citing additional concerns about the risk of placenta previa, placenta accreta and uterine rupture during subsequent pregnancies, prominent obstetrician-gynecologists Ingrid Nygaard and Dwight Cruikshank stated, "Given the absence of rigorous scientific evidence, we believe that it is currently ill-advised to routinely give all prenatal patients the choice of their desired mode of delivery."

The American College of Nurse-Midwives stated, “Regrettably, the opinion issued by the ACOG Committee on Ethics may lead to an increasing level of distrust between health care professionals and the women who seek our services. The purported benefits of cesarean section on demand are unproven and the known risks place the woman’s life and reproductive future on the line. This is the message women must receive.”

The baby also is at risk. With planned cesareans, some babies are inadvertently delivered prematurely. Studies show that babies born even slightly before they are ready may experience problems breathing and are five times more likely to be admitted to intermediate or intensive care. Premature babies also have more difficulty breastfeeding.

“Contrary to the ACOG statement, fear of pain in labor need not force women to have cesareans. All women benefit from emotional, physical and most importantly, educational support in labor and when making decisions about the birth of their child. Studies have shown the value of doula services in lowering the cesarean section rate,” added DONA President Ann Grauer.

Lamaze, ACNM, DONA, CIMS and ANACS believe that all caregivers should respect the birth process and not intervene without compelling medical indication. Carolyn Rafferty, executive director of ANACS reported, “A growing number of obstetric nurses are deeply concerned at the prospect of placing increasing numbers of women at unnecessary surgical risk. We implore obstetrical nurses around the country to speak up for women and fulfill the nursing obligation of patient advocacy.”

Collectively, Lamaze, ACNM, DONA, CIMS and ANACS speak on behalf of nearly 15,000 childbirth professionals and reach approximately three million expectant parents each year. For more information, visit www.lamaze.org, www.acnm.org, www.dona.org, www.motherfriendly.org or www.anacs.org.

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