



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Postpartum Depression is Top Priority for New ACOG President

**Chicago, IL** -- Today Gerald F. Joseph Jr, MD, of Louisiana, became the 60th president of The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), based in Washington, DC. During his inaugural speech at ACOG's Annual Clinical Meeting, Dr. Joseph announced that postpartum depression is the theme of his presidential initiative.

"While in an ideal world, the newly delivered mother is at the peak of her reproductive health, with a beautiful child and, ideally, a supportive, loving family, this unfortunately is not always the case," said Dr. Joseph. "Studies show that this is a most vulnerable time for our patients, especially those prone to depression or those with a history of depression." Complicating matters is that the new mother often can't bring herself to admit to any problems or negative emotions due to societal pressures, he said. Instead of asking for help, she may feel guilty for not being 'grateful' or a 'good' mother.

Dr. Joseph explained that the 'baby blues,' which affect as many as 80% of new mothers, usually start early after delivery and spontaneously resolve within a very short period of time. "But what happens when these negative feelings don't resolve and true major depression becomes a part of the process?" he asked. "This can be devastating for the mother, the child, the partner, the family, and the ob-gyn who is caring for her."

There are three areas in particular that need to be addressed, according to Dr. Joseph. "First, we need to determine the true prevalence and incidence of postpartum depression," he said. Because definitions of depression vary among different studies, postpartum depression is estimated to range anywhere from five percent to more than 25 percent, depending on these changing definitions and the diversity of populations studied. "Second, the available screening tools to assess potentially at-risk pregnant women often are imprecise and leave much to be desired. And, finally, we need to develop evidence-based guidelines for ACOG members to screen for postpartum depression."

"We also need to know how ACOG Fellows screen and identify patients suffering from postpartum depression," Dr. Joseph continued. "When do they counsel? How do they treat? Do they refer to other specialists for treatment? What kind of local programs are available for education and support? These are all questions that we need answers to."

In addition, Dr. Joseph said, "Let us hope that this is the year for real, meaningful health care reform. Effective, affordable health care needs to start on the front end with prevention of disease, rather than the acute care on the back end that too many of our citizens receive today. We end up caring for sicker patients and paying much more for expensive acute care rather than the less expensive preventive care. As president, I assure you that ACOG will continue to push for preventive care for all."

Dr. Joseph is a senior consultant in gynecology at the Ochsner Health Center in Covington, LA, and clinical assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Louisiana State University and Tulane University in New Orleans. He has been an ACOG Fellow since 1978. Dr. Joseph has chaired the Committee on Scientific Program and the task forces on Enhancing Practice Satisfaction and District and Section Contributions. He has been a member of ACOG's Executive Board and has served as the Executive Board liaison to the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. Dr. Joseph has served on the committees on Gynecologic Practice, Nominations, Credentials, and Long-Range Planning and on the task forces on Medical Student Recruitment, Nominations Process, and Scope of Practice. He has been a member of the Council of District Chairs, the Grievance Committee's Appeals Panel Committee, and the medical advisory board for *pause*® magazine.

Dr. Joseph has served in numerous regional leadership positions, including chair of ACOG District VII and the Louisiana Section. He has also served as District VII scientific program chair and as a member of the Missouri Section Advisory Council. Dr. Joseph is past president of the New Orleans Gynecological and Obstetrical Society and the Southeastern Obstetrical and Gynecological Society. He has been active in the Central Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists for many years, serving as a member of the board of trustees and as vice president.

Dr. Joseph received his medical degree from Tulane University and completed his residency at Louisiana State University in Shreveport.

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*The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) is the nation's leading group of physicians providing health care for women. As a private, voluntary, nonprofit membership organization, ACOG: strongly advocates for quality health care for women; maintains the highest standards of clinical practice and continuing education of its members; promotes patient education; and increases awareness among its members and the public of the changing issues facing women's health care.*