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Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida and Ethicon Endo-Surgery Train Gynecologists on Innovative Surgical Procedure for Women

JACKSONVILLE -- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's (BCBSF) female customers have another option for surgery when faced with a hysterectomy, thanks to a unique training program between the health insurer and Ethicon Endo-Surgery, a Johnson & Johnson company.

BCBSF is the first insurance company in the state to offer this type of advanced training to its gynecologists, said William E. Rush, M.D., vice president and regional medical director for BCBSF. "This program is just one example of how BCBSF is working in partnership with our providers to deliver a higher quality of care to patients. It's a major step forward in advancing women's health in Florida."

The training agreement is through Health Options, BCBSF's health maintenance organization, and Cincinnati-based Ethicon Endo-Surgery, the world's leading manufacturer of videoscopic and ultrasonic energy-based surgical instruments.

Fifteen gynecologists who participate in Health Options in the West Coast region* of the state were selected to attend a comprehensive clinical training program at the Ethicon Endo-Surgery Institute in Cincinnati, an advanced videoscopic surgical education facility. This intensive training covers the use of videoscopic surgery for a procedure known as laparoscopically assisted vaginal hysterectomy (LAVH), which may be safer for properly selected women, allowing them to recover more quickly than traditional abdominal surgery. Additionally, eight gynecologists in the West Coast region will serve as advanced trainers and mentors for other area gynecologists.

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A hysterectomy is one of the most frequently performed surgical procedures, second only to Cesarean Section, according to the Mayo Clinic. By the age of 60 one of every three women will have had a hysterectomy. Currently, more than 60 percent of all hysterectomies are done through the abdomen with traditional surgery.

“The benefits of a videoscopic hysterectomy are tremendous for women,” Dr. Rush said. “They will have reduced pain, less scarring, fewer complications and a shorter recovery time than with an abdominal hysterectomy.” Recovery times vary, but in most cases women should be able to return to normal activities in two to three weeks, compared with five to six weeks for abdominal surgery.

Videoscopic surgery, also known as laparoscopic surgery, is performed with a device called a laparoscope, a video camera and light source, which is passed through a specially designed tube and into the body. Special surgical instruments are then used by the surgeon to make repairs through other small incisions while viewing the procedure on video monitors in the operating room. Other operations that can be performed include gallbladder removal, colon resection, bladder neck suspension surgery for urinary stress incontinence, gastroesophageal reflux surgery for chronic heartburn and hernia repair.

Dr. Rush suggests that women consult with their doctor about the proper procedure for them if they need a hysterectomy. “Personal physicians can best advise patients about videoscopic surgery and its benefits to see if it is the best option,” Dr. Rush said.

BCBSF and Health Options, Inc. are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies nationwide. A financially strong, tax-paying mutual insurance company, BCBSF is subject to the same regulation by the Department of Insurance as other insurers operating in Florida.

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* Gynecologists are located in the counties of: Hillsborough, Pinellas, Manatee, Sarasota