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REPORT REVEALS SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN MATERNITY CARE QUALITY AND VALUE

Overuse of Cesarean Section and Other Interventions Puts Women and Babies at Risk, Increases Costs

New York NY – Over 31% of U.S. births are now by cesarean section although a 5% to 10% rate is best for mothers and babies. The extra cost is well over \$2.5 billion per year. The excess cesareans buy no reduction in maternal and newborn deaths. But they cause unneeded exposure to the dozens of adverse effects more common with c-sections. This is just the most striking example of how health care provided to mothers giving birth exposes them to avoidable harm and expense. These conclusions are found in *Evidence-Based Maternity Care: What It Is and What It Can Achieve*, a report released today by Childbirth Connection, The Reforming States Group, and the Milbank Memorial Foundation.

The report cites an extensive body of evidence to make the case that, despite paying top dollar, American women do not receive the best maternity care. It is the most comprehensive review to date of how maternity care is delivered, financed, and experienced by mothers, families, and health care payers. It concludes that maternity care can be significantly improved using evidence-based care.

Main Recommendations for Improvement

To speed adoption of evidence-based maternity care, the report recommends:

- Develop a standardized evidence-based set of maternity care performance measures to address overuse and underuse.
- Incorporate these measures into Medicaid quality improvement activities, and encourage private insurers and other entities to adopt them.
- Reform the reimbursement system – with such strategies as reducing payment for overused services, increasing payment for underused services, and rewarding high-performing providers and facilities.
- Support more research into evidence-based maternity care, including long-term effects of common maternity practices.
- Increase the use of evidence-based maternity care by educating a wide range of stakeholders.

“If implemented, these recommendations can help close the evidence-practice gap in maternity care,” said Maureen Corry, co-author and Executive Director, Childbirth Connection. “There’s a role for everyone - clinicians, health systems, payers, policymakers, consumers and the media. It’s time to seize the opportunities to ensure that all mothers and babies receive safe, effective and satisfying maternity care.”

Maternal and newborn care are the most costly hospital conditions for both Medicaid (which pays for 42% of all births in the country) and private insurers (shouldering 51%). And, the proportion of Medicaid-covered births is growing, making the quality and cost of maternity care a significant public policy issue. The report finds that lower intensity care, like that provided by midwives, is safe and effective, avoids many procedures with established risks, and is cheaper. Yet, just a fraction of women who give birth in hospitals today receive low intensity care.

And while the US spends much more on health care, its performance lags far behind other developed nations on quality indicators including low birthweight, perinatal and maternal mortality, and cesarean rates. The report spotlights the market influences and other factors contributing to what has been called the "Perinatal Paradox: doing more and accomplishing less" (Rosenblatt 1989).

About Milbank Memorial Fund

Milbank Memorial Fund is an endowed operating foundation that works to improve health by helping decision makers in the public and private sectors acquire and use the best available evidence to inform policy for health care and population health. The Fund has engaged in nonpartisan analysis, study, research and communication on significant issues in health policy since its inception in 1905.

About Reforming States Group

The Reforming States Group (RSG), organized in 1992, is a voluntary association of leaders in health policy in the legislative and executive branches of government from all fifty states, Canada, England, Scotland and Australia.

Childbirth Connection

Founded in 1918, Childbirth Connection is a not-for-profit organization working to improve the quality of maternity care through research, education, advocacy and policy. As a voice for the needs and interests of childbearing families, Childbirth Connection uses best research evidence and the results of its periodic national *Listening to Mothers* surveys to inform policy, practice, education and research.

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