

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DON'T WAIT TOO LONG! FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR CERVICAL HEALTH TODAY.

Hendersonville, NC, January 04, 2009– During the month of January, Blue Ridge Community Health Services (BRCHS) will be celebrating National Cervical Health Awareness Month with a month long clinic focus on the very important, yet often overlooked, cervix!

Dr. Shannon Dowler, Medical Director at BRCHS has seen many patients who know firsthand the value of getting screened early. "Maria was a 45 year old female who came to our clinic for a physical. She was in normally good health but had not had a pap smear done since her 30's. Her pap smear showed cells that suggested she might have an early cancer. We were able to get her referred to a gynecologist where they confirmed an early cervical cancer and proceeded with surgery. It's a classic example of someone without any symptoms who, if she had waited much longer, would have had a much different outcome!"

The various offices of BRCHS will have information available in their lobbies on cervical health, including cervical infections and cancer. Dr. Dowler plans a written informational series to BRCHS clinical staff on cervical cancer each week in January as well as a comprehensive lecture to BRCHS medical providers on cervical infections and cervical cancer. "Our medical knowledge is constantly growing and recommendations frequently change, so providing on-going clinical updates to providers and staff is critical in the provision of excellent medical care," said Dr. Dowler.

Dr. Dowler reports that, "According to the CDC, cervical cancer is the easiest female cancer to prevent with regular screening tests and follow-up. It also is highly curable when found and treated early." Cervical cancer is often found in women over 30 even though all women who are sexually active are at risk. Fortunately cervical cancer is highly preventable, if one gets routinely screened via a pap smear. A pap smear looks for cell changes that might become cancer if they are not treated. The importance of

a pap smear is made evident by the fact that 6 out of 10 cervical cancers occur in women who have never had a pap smear or who have not had one in the last 5 years. “This statistic might be due to the fact that cervical cancer does not usually show symptoms until it gets very advanced. Women should start having pap smears at the age of 21 or three years after their first sexual encounter,” added Dr. Dowler.

Cervical health is also affected by a group of viruses referred to as HPV. Fortunately, there is also a HPV test that can be done along with the pap smear to determine if a woman has one of the more serious strains of HPV. HPV has recently been in the news since there is now a vaccine that can help guard against these more serious strains. “Speak with your health care provider to determine if you need an HPV test or if you qualify for the HPV vaccine,” urged Dr. Dowler.

Dr. Dowler is an established speaker on the subject of Sexually Transmitted Infections and Adolescent Sexuality and has spoken locally as well as at the state level on these subjects. She frequently presents to community groups and adolescents on these topics. If you or your organization would be interested in further information or a future speaking engagement, call 692-4289 ext 2509, or write to BRCHS at P.O. Box 5151, Hendersonville, NC 28793.

BRCHS has been serving Hendersonville and the surrounding communities for more than 45 years in an effort to provide high quality and affordable medical, dental and mental health care as well as promote health awareness/education.

If you would like more information about BRCHS, call 692-4289 ext. 2509; write to BRCHS at P. O. Box 5151, Hendersonville, NC 28793; or visit online at www.brchs.com.



"Dowler, Shannon DSC_013.jpg": Shannon Dowler, M.D., ABFM, FAAFP, Blue Ridge Community Health Services Medical Director.