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## TODAYS HEALTH FOR THE EMPOWERED WOMAN

### THE PELVIC EXAM

Recently the American Academy of Physicians issued a statement that routine pelvic exams in non symptomatic women are unnecessary and that there is no evidence of having any clinical value or of preventing disease and should be abandoned. Cited was fear and pain and embarrassment of the patient for a procedure that they now deem not needed. The American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology, entrusted with the health care of women and children, markedly disagrees. We now live in an era where “wellness” and preventative medicine are not only good practice but cost saving. A disease or pathologic condition when found early lends itself to proper treatment that can prolong life, improve quality of life, and reduce costs and hospitalization and expensive procedures. Gynecologists are primary care physicians for women and frequently the only doctor a woman sees annually. A well woman exam includes a thorough history, a complete physical exam including the pelvic exam, age related discussions about such subjects as contraception, venereal disease prevention, menopause symptoms, osteoporosis prevention and treatment, etc. Even in a NON SYMPTOMATIC patient the pelvic exam is of huge importance and when done by a well trained, caring provider, need not be painful nor embarrassing. The goal is three fold: 1.) to detect external genital lesions, tumors, infections; 2.) to detect vaginal lesions, tumors, cysts, cancers and bladder or rectal prolapse, to visualize the cervix for disease that might include non symptomatic early precancerous lesions; 3.) to evaluate the internal organs (uterus, tubes and ovaries) for infection, benign and cancerous tumors, etc. In my forty years of practicing gynecology I have found innumerable problems that leant themselves to early and successful treatment that would have been missed if the current proscription against routine pelvic exams had been in effect. Some of you reading this article today are alive and well because I performed the proper exam and recommended treatment. I am not special, just a board certified gynecologist doing what is right. To suggest that a pelvic exam only be performed when a woman has a specific complaint is ludicrous. Are we entering into an age of medicine that physical exams are only done when someone is sick? Imagine only going to a dentist when your teeth hurt; a cardiologist only when having a heart attack, a pediatrician only when tonsillitis is severe. Crazy right? Preventative medicine saves lives, period. So why this attitude about not examining well patients? In two words, cost saving. The health care system is broken and largely bankrupt. The number crunchers feel that a tumor not diagnosed here or there is not worth the expense of examining everyone, except if it is you or your loved one. Remember when the same thing was tried about mammograms but the general public and physicians fought back and now death rates from breast cancer are dropping. Colon cancer death rates are dropping because of colonoscopies that can detect minor precancerous lesions early in non symptomatic patients. In conclusion, take advantage of preventative medicine, follow the guidelines of your physician’s specialty—they are not self serving, live and eat well and try to fight back against those who would rob you of your right to wellness.