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**BLUECROSS FOUNDATION TO UNDERWRITE TELEMEDICINE PILOT PROJECT IN EAST TENNESSEE**

*Community Health Network and Regional Obstetrical Consultants Partner  
to Improve the Health of Pregnant Mothers and Babies in Rural Areas*

The Community Health Network (CHN) and Regional Obstetrical Consultants (ROC) have jointly announced a major initiative to improve the health of pregnant mothers and their babies in rural areas of East Tennessee. The project, made possible with a \$1.8 million grant from the BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Health Foundation (BCBSTHF), will use telemedicine technology to connect health care providers and patients in remote areas with high-risk obstetrical specialists in Knoxville and Chattanooga.

BlueCross officials will present a \$1.8 million check to fund a three-year project on Monday, January 26<sup>th</sup>. At that time, the pilot project will "go live" with the first three centers linked, and a patient will be screened via telemedicine connections. **[MEDIA ADVISORY: The check presentation will take place at 2:30 p.m. EST at the offices of Regional Obstetrical Consultants at 902 McCallie Avenue, in Chattanooga; other "live" sites will be in Tullahoma and Newport, and there will be a media/VIP connection in the Nashville area. Please see the attached sheet for full details.]**

This pilot project is designed to demonstrate the usefulness and practicality of telemedicine to serve rural areas and improve health outcomes while saving health care dollars. Telemedicine uses high-speed broadband connectivity, specialized computer video equipment, and digital medical devices to connect specialists in urban areas with rural patients and their physicians and share real-time medical data to perform remote consultations over a secure private network.

"Tennessee ranks near the bottom of the list of all states in the category of health care for mothers and their babies," said Dr. Steve Coulter, President of Government and Emerging Markets for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee. "For that reason, we have joined the Governor and other leaders in the state in supporting programs that are designed specifically to improve perinatal outcomes. This program will do that, especially in the underserved areas of our state."

As a part of this pilot project, doctors in 11 small cities in East and East-Central Tennessee will be provided access to telemedicine equipment to connect to the perinatologists in Chattanooga and Knoxville. The program will be connected to the Community Health Network's existing network for telemedicine and other telehealth applications which stretches across the state. The CHN Telehealth Network is structured to provide high-speed connectivity for physicians in rural

parts of the state. Obstetrical patients at any of the CHN Telehealth Network's 55 existing sites or at any of the 11 new perinatal sites will then be able to consult in real-time with a remote perinatologist by scheduling a telemedicine visit in their local community.

According to Dr. David Adair, CEO of Regional Obstetrical Consultants, clinics in Tullahoma and Newport will be operational by mid-February. Over the next 12 to 18 months, nine other areas will be added.

"The specialists at Regional Obstetrical Consultants have worked closely with obstetricians and family practitioners in small towns throughout East Tennessee for many years, and we're keenly aware of the obstacles they and their patients see when the need arises for specialty treatment. This telemedicine network will link those doctors and their patients directly with the perinatal centers in Chattanooga and Knoxville, and the result will be better, more efficient health care for Tennesseans," Dr. Adair said. "We see this program as setting the standard for the use of telemedicine to improve health care across the entire state. In the future, we envision other specialists participating in the pilot project as it expands across the state."

Dr. Adair also said that ROC and CHN will work closely with the TennCare Bureau to make this program available to all TennCare patients.

The project will be administered jointly by the Community Health Network (CHN) and Regional Obstetrical Consultants, P.C. (ROC). CHN is a nonprofit organization specializing in the management of cooperative health information technology and telehealth among community health centers serving rural and underserved populations in Tennessee. ROC is the high-risk pregnancy specialist practice (perinatologists) in Chattanooga and Knoxville. The area's two perinatal centers – Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga and the University of Tennessee Medical Center in Knoxville – also will be connected and participate in the program.

### **About Community Health Network**

The Community Health Network, Inc. (CHN) is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corporation whose members include 17 community health center organizations and the Tennessee Primary Care Association (TPCA), collectively operating approximately 100 clinics. CHN's mission is to improve the quality and efficiency of health care delivery for medically underserved communities by providing affordable, integrated technology systems, expertise, and related services for community health centers. For more information go to [www.CommunityHealth.net](http://www.CommunityHealth.net). Patients interested in scheduling a telehealth appointment at a participating community health center should call 866-519-2494x4.

### **About Regional Obstetrical Consultants**

Regional Obstetrical Consultants (ROC) is the largest perinatal medical practice in the state of Tennessee and one of the largest in the Southeast. With a staff of eight physicians licensed in the field of maternal-fetal medicine, ROC has its principal offices in Chattanooga and Knoxville, with outreach clinics in Morristown and Cookeville, Tennessee, and in Dalton, Georgia. ROC is the exclusive provider of perinatal services at Erlanger Hospital (Chattanooga) and UT Medical Center (Knoxville), which are both designated as regional perinatal centers for the State of Tennessee.

### **About BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Health Foundation**

The BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Health Foundation, Inc. (THF) was established in December, 2003 as a 501(c)(3) foundation organized to promote the philanthropic mission of BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee by awarding grants focused on high-impact initiatives across the state, which promote healthy lifestyle choices and help control health care costs for all Tennessee residents. THF, working with civic and economic partners, is dedicated to the support of research, innovative programs and creative approaches to improve the health and quality of life of Tennesseans for generations to come.