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**Contact:**

Michael Taylor, Executive Director  
Marketing & Communications  
UPMC Health Plan  
412-454-7534  
[taylor2@upmc.edu](mailto:taylor2@upmc.edu)

**UPMC Health Plan Starts Doula Program for Pregnant Women in Braddock Area**

**PITTSBURGH (February 28, 2007)** — UPMC Health Plan is among the first health plans in the nation to provide coverage for women who participate in a doula program, which is being offered as a pilot program to pregnant women who live in the UPMC Braddock hospital service area.

UPMC Health Plan — working in conjunction with East Liberty Family Health Care Center, Magee-Womens Hospital, and UPMC Braddock — has created a doula program for UPMC for You members who live in the UPMC Braddock service area. UPMC for You is the Medical Assistance program of UPMC Health Plan.

UPMC Health Plan is one of 12 health plans nationally that were selected by the Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc., to develop and test innovative strategies to improve health care quality for racially and ethnically diverse populations by addressing disparities in care. The initiative is called “Improving Health Care Quality for Racially and Ethnically Diverse Populations.”

“Doula” is a Greek word that has come to mean a specially trained woman who “mothers the mother” through pregnancy and beyond. Trained doulas provide non-medical emotional and informational support. Doulas work with the mother before, during, and after childbirth. Doulas assist the mother and her partner in coping with their new role as parents and help them to understand the importance of well-baby care.

One of the goals of the UPMC for You doula program is to reduce the low-birth-weight rate for its members who live in the Braddock community. In 2003 (the last year for

which statistics are available) 11.4 percent of all babies born in Pittsburgh were considered low-birth-weight babies (i.e., below 5.5 pounds). The Braddock area was selected because of its statistical history of low-birth-weight babies. The program is voluntary.

“There is a lot of literature to suggest that women who work with doulas make less use of epidural anesthesia, have shorter labors and tend to have a higher percentage of vaginal deliveries,” said Dennis English, MD, Vice President of Medical Affairs for Magee-Womens Hospital. “The personal, one-on-one association should be beneficial to getting these women involved in prenatal care.”

The program recruits and trains women from the community to serve as doulas. It is hoped that because they understand the social and physical issues facing these women, they can help participants overcome many of these obstacles. The program consists of six pre-natal visits and four post-partum visits. Doulas may also assist mothers during both labor and recovery.

“Through this program we hope to increase our knowledge and understanding of issues that impact care in our target communities,” said Michael Culyba, MD, Vice President of Medical Affairs for UPMC Health Plan. “We know that the lack of care, or limited care, is a problem, and that access to care and transportation can be issues as well. By working with the community and the Caring Physician Program, together we can accomplish more than we can do alone.”

“Doulas have been shown to make important contributions to the improved clinical outcomes and emotional well-being of mothers and infants,” said Diane P. Holder, President of UPMC Health Plan. “If we can find ways to reduce the number of low-birth-weight babies, we believe there is an opportunity to improve the clinical and financial outcomes associated with this serious problem. It’s an opportunity to help improve access to services and mitigate medical and behavioral risk factors that increase the odds that a woman will deliver prematurely.”

Studies have shown that doulas can work with mothers to help in reducing risk factors associated with premature birth as well as low-birth-weight rates. These factors include timeliness of prenatal care, smoking, nutrition, and stress.

"We are pleased to have the opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of a doula on pregnancy services," said Irene Frederick, MD, an obstetrician with the UPMC Shadyside Family Medicine Residency, and director of The Birth Circle of East Liberty Family Health Care Center. "By assessing the effects of pregnancy related educational and support services delivered by a doula, we will evaluate the impact of a doula as an integral part of obstetrical care management by a health plan."

Any pregnant UPMC for You member can participate in the program if she lives in one of the following ZIP codes: 15035, 15104, 15110, 15112, 15120, 15122, 15137, 15148, 15145, 15218, 15221.

#### About UPMC Health Plan

UPMC Health Plan, the second-largest health insurer in Western Pennsylvania, is owned by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), one of the nation's top-ranked health systems. The 2006 U.S. News & World Report/NCQA listing of "America's Best Health Plans" ranked UPMC Health Plan # 7 in the nation, making it the highest ranked plan in Pennsylvania. It has also led the nation in breast cancer screening for three consecutive years. The integrated partner companies of the UPMC Insurance Services Division – which includes UPMC Health Plan, Work Partners, EAP Solutions, UPMC for You (Medical Assistance), and Community Care Behavioral Health – offer a full range of group health insurance, Medicare, CHIP, Medical Assistance, behavioral health, employee assistance, and workers' compensation products and services to nearly 1 million members. Our local provider network includes UPMC as well as community providers, totaling more than 80 hospitals and more than 7,000 physicians in a 28-county region.

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