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For Release
March 26, 2013

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Local Hospitals Develop, Implement Consistent Breastfeeding Promotion Standards

Franklin County's four hospital systems are working together to improve the health and wellbeing of infants and children by encouraging women to breastfeed.

Through the Central Ohio Hospital Council, hospital maternity representatives convened for more than a year to develop "Community Standards on Breastfeeding Promotion." The standards are designed to ensure that best practices are being implemented in hospitals throughout the community to promote breastfeeding by new mothers. The standards also call for consistent education of new parents on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for at least six months for both mothers and their babies.

The standards were approved in February by the COHC Board of Directors, comprised of the four Franklin County hospital system CEOs, and will take effect community-wide on June 1, 2013.

"Our hospitals believe that breastfeeding not only is the best option to provide babies with the nutrition they need, but also helps ensure that children have a healthy start to life. Breastfed babies have fewer infections and illnesses, which results in fewer trips to the doctor and less spent on medicine and supplies. These community standards are another example of the commitment of our hospital leaders to work together to address community health concerns," said Jeff Klingler, Hospital Council president and CEO.

According to the "Community Standards on Breastfeeding Promotion," local hospitals will strive to:

- Place babies in their mother's arms within 30 minutes of birth for at least an hour;
- Initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth;
- Provide newborns exclusively with breast milk during their hospital stay;
- Encourage mothers to "room in" by remaining with their newborns for 24 hours a day;

- Educate parents on best breastfeeding practices and on community resources available after discharge;
- Discontinue routinely providing free samples of and coupons for infant formula.

At their February meeting, the hospital system CEOs also adopted an employer pledge to encourage their associates to continue providing their babies with breast milk after returning to work. The idea of an employer pledge surfaced following a survey the hospital systems conducted late last year on the barriers local pregnant women perceive when considering breastfeeding. The survey was conducted from Sept. 1 to Oct. 1, 2012, and was completed by 581 women who were seen in a prenatal clinic operated by the 4 hospital systems, a community health center or Columbus Public Health. The results show that the top barrier for women considering whether to breastfeed was concerns over returning to work or school. Other top barriers included:

- Wanting others to help with feedings;
- Concerns over pain or discomfort; and
- Not fully understanding the benefits to breastfeeding.

The pledge will be shared with – and its adoption encouraged by -- other central Ohio employers.

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Facts About Breastfeeding

The American Academy of Pediatrics and other professional healthcare organizations recommend that mothers should breastfeed or provide breast milk to their newborns for a minimum of six months due to a number of benefits to both mother and baby:

- *Breastfeeding protects babies from infections and illnesses that include diarrhea, ear infections, pneumonia, and inflammatory bowel syndrome.*
- *Breastfed babies are less likely to develop asthma, and are less likely to be readmitted to the hospital for other illnesses.*
- *Children who are breastfed for six months are less likely to become obese, and have a reduced chance of developing type 2 diabetes.*
- *Breastfeeding reduces the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).*
- *Mothers who breastfeed have a decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers.*

About the Central Ohio Hospital Council

The Central Ohio Hospital Council was created in 2008 and is comprised of Columbus' four hospital systems: Mount Carmel Health System, Nationwide Children's Hospital, OhioHealth and The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. The Hospital Council serves as the forum for community hospitals to collaborate with each other and with other community stakeholders to improve the quality, value and accessibility of health care in the central Ohio region. More information on the Council, including the "Community Standards on Breastfeeding Promotion," is available at www.centralohiohospitals.org.