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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Date: May 8, 2013**

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### 7<sup>h</sup> Annual Community Health Education Day Set for May 16

Brewster, NY—"Healthy Choices for Life" is the theme of the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Lower Hudson Valley Perinatal Network's Community Health Education Day being held throughout the region on Thursday, May 16. The sponsoring organization, the Lower Hudson Valley Perinatal Network (LHVPN), is dedicated to providing support and improving health care to all women of childbearing age, particularly those at risk. It serves Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties.

Healthy Choices for Life expresses the philosophy of preconception and interconception health. This means being healthy in the months leading up to a pregnancy and also between pregnancies.

"Most women know the importance of prenatal doctor visits in the first trimester, but having a healthy baby begins even *before* pregnancy and involves the health of the father too," explains Allen Beals, MD, Commissioner of Health, who practiced as an obstetricians for 22 years before going to law school and entering public service.

The "Healthy Choices for Life" theme is crucial also because approximately half of all pregnancies are unplanned, and in the beginning women may be unaware they are pregnant. Health in these early weeks is critical because hazards may put the developing fetus at risk.

The five most important things for women to do before getting pregnant, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health, are:

1. Take folic acid every day for at least 3 months before getting pregnant. The recommended dose is 400 to 800 micrograms (400 to 800 mcg or 0.4 to 0.8 mg). This lowers your baby's risk of birth defects of the brain and spine. (Folic acid is available in some foods, but it is hard to get enough from food alone.)
2. Stop smoking and drinking alcohol. Ask your doctor for help, if needed.
3. Be sure any medical condition you may have, such as asthma, diabetes, depression or obesity, is under control. Be sure your vaccinations are up to date.
4. Talk to your doctor about all over-the-counter and prescription medicines you use, including dietary or herbal supplements. Some are not safe during pregnancy; others may need to be continued.
5. Avoid contact with toxic substances or materials both at work and home. This includes cat and rodent droppings and harmful chemicals.

Men can improve their reproductive and preconception health as well by reducing stress, eating right, not smoking, avoiding excessive alcohol use and other harmful chemicals and toxins, and talking to their healthcare providers about their own medications.

For further information on preconception health, please visit the US Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health at [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov). For information on the Lower Hudson Valley Perinatal Network, you can visit online at <http://www.lhvpn.net>

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of our community. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at [www.putnamcountyny.com](http://www.putnamcountyny.com); or visit our social media sites on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/putnamhealth](http://www.facebook.com/putnamhealth) and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.