

A stylized graphic on the left side of the cover features a light purple profile of a woman's head facing right, overlaid on a grid pattern representing a globe. The background is split vertically into a light purple left half and a dark blue right half.

ESSENTIAL LEARNING OBJECTIVES IN WOMEN'S HEALTH

Association of Professors of
Gynecology and Obstetrics

Undergraduate Medical
Education Committee

Forward

A medical student's competency in women's health has been on the minds of medical schools and their faculties, medical students, the government, the public, and professional academic medicine organizations like the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics (APGO) who seek to bridge gaps in student education in women's health at the undergraduate medical education level.

The core objectives for obstetrics and gynecology can be found in APGO's *Medical Student Educational Objectives in Obstetrics and Gynecology, 7th edition*. These learning objectives are designed as an outline of core competencies for medical students rotating through a clerkship in obstetrics and gynecology and are not intended to include the entire range of women's health education. They relate to reproductive issues in women's health, covering material important for all medical students, regardless of their choice of specialty career.

In order to address the broader issues of comprehensive women's health education, APGO produced the *Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health*. The *Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health* delineate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for medical students to develop competencies in women's health care. After a review of the APGO *Medical Student Educational Objectives in Obstetrics and Gynecology, 6th edition* and the *Report of the Public Health Service Task Force on Women's Health Issues*, the APGO Undergraduate Medical Education Committee formulated the new objectives. The *Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health* are not designed to replace the core objectives in obstetrics and gynecology or any other discipline's objectives, but rather to be emphasized by all disciplines who care for women. The *Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health* are meant to complement the APGO *Medical Student Educational Objectives*, so that educators and students can begin to internalize patterns of skills and behaviors that promote quality health care for women.

With the founding of the APGO Women's Healthcare Education Office, APGO is establishing a leadership role in interdisciplinary women's health care education at the undergraduate level. The new office advocates the utilization of the *Medical Student Educational Objectives in Obstetrics and Gynecology* and the *Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health* among women's health care educators including not only obstetrics and gynecology, but also internal medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, psychiatry, and surgery. These objectives are intended to become a model for interdisciplinary medical educators to use when reviewing medical school curricula. Rather than adding women's health objectives to the already dense curricula, the *Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health* enhance and reinforce current women's health objectives. It is also our intention to cultivate communication between course directors to strengthen interdisciplinary efforts to improve undergraduate medical education in women's health.

WOMEN'S

Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health

History

The general medical history will incorporate a gynecologic assessment for every woman. Questions relating to women's health issues will be routinely asked, along with other questions specific to particular problems.

The student will perform a thorough obstetric/gynecologic history as a portion of a general medical history, which will include the following: chief complaint, present illness, menstrual history, obstetric history, gynecologic history, sexual history, family history, social history. The student will demonstrate the ability to communicate with the patient with sensitivity to her age, gender, racial and cultural background, sexual orientation, personality, mental state, and economic status. The student will be able to communicate this information in a well-organized, written, chart format.

Physical Exam

The general medical examination will incorporate a thorough obstetric-gynecologic examination. It will include breast, abdomen, pelvis, and rectovaginal examination. The results will be communicated to the patient and to others in a well-organized chart format. The student will incorporate patient education in the exam, including breast and external genital self-examination.

Diagnosis and Management Plan

The student will demonstrate the ability to generate a problem list, formulate diagnostic impressions, and develop a management plan, which will include laboratory and diagnostic studies, treatment options, patient education, plans for continuing care, economic considerations, and assessment of patient values.

Pharmacology

Students will know that volumes of distribution and pharmacokinetics of some drugs may be significantly different in

women than in men. Students will know the interactions of oral contraceptives and estrogen replacement regimens with commonly used drugs such as antibiotics, anticonvulsants, anticoagulants, antihypertensive agents, and psychiatric agents. Students will know which drugs are teratogenic and which are contraindicated in pregnancy.

Preventive Care

Students will recognize the value of routine health surveillance as part of health promotion and disease prevention. This will include knowledge of current screening recommendations with regard to Papanicolaou smear, mammogram, blood-pressure monitoring, blood-lipid profiles, and occult blood in the stool. The students will demonstrate the ability to counsel patients regarding the following topics: contraception, prevention of sexually transmitted disease, diet and nutrition, exercise, stress management, risk-taking behavior, substance abuse, immunization, seat-belt use, and personal safety.

Environmental Exposures

Women who are exposed to environmental toxins in the home and in the workplace face different risks from men because of the potential for pregnancy. Students will demonstrate understanding of the reproductive consequences of exposure to lead, dioxins, solvents, and biological and infectious substances.

Immunizations

Students will know the current recommendations for immunizations for adult women and will know which immunizations are contraindicated in pregnancy.

Nutrition

Students will be able to counsel patients in good nutrition habits, including recommended intake of calories, fiber, fat, and essential vitamins and elements. Students will be able to recognize nutritional

deficiencies, in particular iron deficiency. They will be able to describe an evaluation of anemia and recognize its impact on pregnant and nonpregnant women's health.

Contraception, Sterilization, and Abortion

Students will demonstrate knowledge of contraceptive methods (pharmacologic and nonpharmacologic) and will be able to counsel a patient regarding their efficacy, risks and benefits, contraindications, and financial considerations. Knowledge of sterilization procedures for men and women and of abortion should include understanding of basic techniques available, benefits, short- and long-term risks, including medical complications, and factors contributing to regret.

Papanicolaou Smear and Culture

The student will demonstrate the skills needed to perform an adequate Papanicolaou smear and to obtain appropriate specimens for detection of sexually transmitted diseases.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Students will know the presenting signs and symptoms and methods of evaluation and management of sexually transmitted diseases, including gonorrhea, chlamydia, herpes simplex, human papillomavirus, syphilis, human immunodeficiency virus, and hepatitis B.

Sexuality

Students will be knowledgeable about the physiologic, emotional, or societal influences of sexuality throughout life stages and development, including puberty, initiation of sexual activity, adult life, menopause, and older age. Students will be able to answer commonly asked questions regarding sexual function in health and illness. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge about heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual modes of sexual expression. Students will be aware of their own sexuality and its impact on patient interactions and will know how to deal with seductive patients.

Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Students will demonstrate knowledge of patterns and common presentations of domestic violence, rape (including date rape), and child abuse. Students will know the immediate and long-term consequences of assault. Students will demonstrate knowledge about the evaluation of suspected adult and child victims and about local laws and resources for referral.

Psychiatric and Behavioral Problems

Students will know that depression, anxiety, and somatization disorders occur disproportionately in women and that their diagnosis and treatment will be handled differently in women. Students will know how to screen for depression and suicidal ideation in women. Students will know that substance abuse may present differently in women and that it will have unique consequences in the reproductive years.

Eating disorders are more common in women; students will know the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and will be aware of the life-threatening nature of anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Menstrual Cycle and Its Abnormalities

Students will be able to describe the parameters of normal menses and thereby be able to recognize abnormal bleeding patterns. Students will know common causes of abnormal bleeding including complications of pregnancy, disorders of the genital tract, systemic illness, coagulopathies, and drugs.

Students will be able to define amenorrhea and will know possible etiologies, including pregnancy, hypothalamic disorders, eating disorders, pituitary disorders, ovarian failure, obstruction or malformation of the genital tract, and drugs. Students will know the common causes of dysmenorrhea and pharmacologic approaches to dysmenorrhea.

Premenstrual Syndrome

Students will be able to define premenstrual syndrome and will be able to discuss with a patient the differential diagnosis, evaluation, and management options for premenstrual complaints.

Menopause

Students will demonstrate understanding of the physiology and psychosocial aspects of menopause. Students will be able to discuss with a patient both short-term and long-term consequences of hypoestrogenism (including hot flashes, urogenital symptoms, risks of cardiovascular disease, and osteoporosis), risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy, and nonhormonal approaches to management.

Adolescence

Students will demonstrate understanding of the physiological and psychological changes associated with puberty and adolescence and will be able to counsel adolescents regarding reduction of high-risk behaviors.

Autoimmune Diseases

Autoimmune diseases affect women more frequently than men. Students will know the signs and symptoms of lupus erythematosus, rheumatoid arthritis, and progressive systemic sclerosis. Students will demonstrate knowledge about the laboratory methods to confirm these diagnoses, including the significance of laboratory tests in the apparent absence of disease. Students will know the signs, symptoms, and diagnostic approach to women with thyroid disorders.

Cardiovascular Disease

Students will know the ways in which myocardial infarction, stroke, and thromboembolic disease may present differently in women. Students will know risk factors, symptoms and signs, diagnostic modalities, and emergency management of cardiovascular conditions in women. Students will know the impact that cardiovascular

diseases, congenital heart defects including mitral valve prolapse, and peripheral vascular diseases have on lifestyle, pregnancy, and medical and surgical conditions.

Pulmonary Disease

The incidence of lung cancer is rising rapidly among women. Students will know the risk factors and presenting signs and symptoms of lung cancer in women.

Students will be knowledgeable about pulmonary conditions that are more common in women, including sarcoidosis, primary pulmonary hypertension, and pulmonary embolus. Students will know the ways in which pulmonary conditions such as asthma, pulmonary hypertension, cystic fibrosis, and other conditions impact on pregnancy.

Neurological Disease

Students will know the signs, symptoms, and diagnostic modalities used in neurological conditions such as multiple sclerosis, myasthenia gravis, and migraine headache, which affect women disproportionately. Students will be knowledgeable about the interaction of seizure disorders and pregnancy, including the effects of anticonvulsant drugs.

Urinary Tract Disorders

Women are disproportionately affected by urinary tract infections and by interstitial cystitis. Students will know the risk factors, signs, and symptoms of urinary tract infections in women and will know treatment options for uncomplicated infections.

Urinary incontinence is more common in women than men and is a significant health problem. Students will be able to define urge incontinence, genuine stress incontinence, overflow incontinence, and detrusor instability. Students will be knowledgeable about the evaluation of women with incontinence and the medical and surgical options for therapy.

Gastrointestinal Disorders

Students will know that some conditions, including gallstones, inflammatory bowel diseases, and functional bowel disorders are more common or present differently in women. Students will know the presenting signs and symptoms, diagnostic modalities, and treatment options for these disorders.

Breast Disease

Students will know current standard for surveillance of an adult woman, including breast self-examination, physical examination, and mammography.

Students will demonstrate understanding of the diagnostic approach to common breast complaints including mass, pain, and nipple discharge. Students will be able to describe the signs and symptoms of the following: fibroadenoma, carcinoma, intraductal papilloma, fibrocystic changes, and mastitis. Students will demonstrate the ability to teach a woman to perform a breast self-examination.

Vulvar and Vaginal Diseases

Students will know the common causes of vaginitis, their presenting symptoms and signs, and methods of evaluation and management, including vaginitis caused by *Trichomonas*, *Candida*, bacterial vaginosis, foreign bodies, and atrophy.

Pelvic Pain

Acute pelvic pain and chronic pelvic pain are common symptoms that may result from a variety of causes, including gastrointestinal, urinary, musculoskeletal, and emotional as well as gynecologic conditions. Students will be able to define acute pelvic pain and chronic pelvic pain, will know their differential diagnoses, and will know the signs and symptoms of pelvic inflammatory disease, endometriosis, and ovarian cysts.

Gynecologic Malignancies

Students will know the risk factors and presenting signs and symptoms of gynecologic malignancies, including gestational

trophoblastic neoplasia, vulvar neoplasms, cervical neoplasms, endometrial malignancies, and ovarian neoplasms.

Students will be knowledgeable about Papanicolaou smear screening for cervical neoplasia, including screening recommendations, and enough about the management of an abnormal Papanicolaou smear to arrange appropriate referral for evaluation.

Students will know the differential diagnosis and management of postmenopausal bleeding in women.

Students will be able to detect by physical examination and evaluate an abnormal adnexal mass, arranging appropriate referral.

Spontaneous Abortion and Ectopic Pregnancy

Bleeding early in pregnancy is a common complaint that may be a sign of life-threatening complications. Ectopic pregnancy remains an important cause of maternal morbidity and mortality. The student will know the methods used to confirm the diagnosis of early pregnancy and the differential diagnosis of early pregnancy bleeding and pain, including spontaneous abortion, septic abortion, and ectopic pregnancy. The student will know when to refer a patient for future evaluation.

Maternal-Fetal Physiology

The student will demonstrate understanding of the maternal physiologic changes associated with pregnancy and the effect of pregnancy on physical exam and common diagnostic studies. The student will be knowledgeable in the ways in which pregnancy may alter the course of medical and surgical conditions, and, conversely, the ways in which these conditions alter the course of the pregnancy.

Examples with which all students will be familiar include anemia, diabetes mellitus, hypertension, urinary tract disorders, infectious diseases, cardiac disease, asthma, alcohol, tobacco and other substance abuse, and acute abdominal symptoms, including variable presentations of appendicitis.

Preconception, Antepartum, and Postpartum Care

The proven benefits of good health prior to conception include a significant reduction in maternal and fetal morbidity and mortality. Students routinely will include preconceptional counseling in health care plans for women of reproductive age. They also will demonstrate knowledge of the conditions and teratogenic drugs that warrant preconceptional counseling including medical conditions such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, heart disease, and renal disease, recurrent pregnancy loss, prior history of obstetrical complications such as prematurity and low birth weight, history or family history of genetic abnormalities, maternal age over 35 years, substance abuse, and nutritional counseling.

The student will consider the possibility of pregnancy in all reproductive-age women and will know how to diagnose it. The student will also know how to distinguish an at-risk pregnancy and be aware of appropriate referral sources. Definitions and common causes of maternal mortality will be understood.

The student will recognize that the process of parturition is complex, and that there is an impact in the peripartum period on medical and surgical conditions, including anemia, diabetes, cardiac disease, hypertension, infectious diseases, asthma, and acute abdominal symptoms. The birth of an infant or the loss of a pregnancy is a major life event, and its impact on the woman should be recognized. The differential diagnosis and signs and symptoms of postpartum depression and anxiety will be recognized.

Social Issues

Poverty affects more women than men and may have more devastating effects on women than on men, particularly for female heads of family. Students will be knowledgeable about the impact of poverty on adult and child health and will demonstrate familiarity with local resources such as shelters, sources of food, foster care, and emergency social services.

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The *Essential Learning Objectives in Women's Health* were produced by the **1996 Undergraduate Medical Education Committee (UMEC) of the Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics (APGO)**.

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APGO Mission

The Association of Professors of Gynecology and Obstetrics (APGO) represents academic obstetricians and gynecologists in the United States and Canada. The Association seeks to advance and improve the study of gynecology and obstetrics by providing a means of exchanging information relating to programs of study, teaching methods, and research activities which promote excellence in the training of professionals in the health care of women.

UMEC Mission

The goal of the Undergraduate Medical Education Committee is to improve undergraduate medical education in obstetrics and gynecology. The committee shall be a resource by which faculties may be provided with an update on teaching techniques, learning objectives, content materials, and evaluation mechanisms.

APGO Women's Healthcare Education Office Mission

To promote and coordinate a comprehensive, integrated, multidisciplinary approach to undergraduate women's health care education in order to enhance the competency of each medical student in issues that primarily impact women's health care, regardless of specialty career choice.

**ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSORS OF
GYNECOLOGY AND OBSTETRICS**

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