**Gynecology**

Gynecology is the study of a woman’s reproductive health. A gynecologist is a medical doctor who works in the field of gynecology, examining the reproductive health of women, as well as diagnosing and treating disease and complications of the female reproductive system.

**Routine Gynecological Care**

According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, young women should begin routine visits to a gynecologist shortly after puberty – usually sometime between the ages of 13 and 15. Once a woman begins visiting a gynecologist, repeat visits are recommended on an annual basis to monitor reproductive health.

During a routine gynecological exam, the doctor will review personal and family health history, conduct a breast exam and determine whether a patient is in need of one or more health screenings for various cancers and sexually-transmitted diseases. Women may receive gynecological council about birth control options, weight, menstruation, nutrition and sexuality.

Gynecologists also conduct a pelvic exam, during which time two fingers are inserted into the vagina, while the other hand presses down on the external abdomen to check for masses or fibroids. Pap smears are usually performed during the pelvic exam, as well. A Pap test is a sampling of the cells inside the cervix and uterus. The cells are examined for abnormalities that could lead to cervical or uterine cancer.

**Gynecological Complications**

Although gynecologists are licensed medical doctors who can treat many health conditions, there are specific complications related to the field of gynecology in which they offer specialized treatment. Some of the most common complications and diseases a gynecologist diagnoses and treats are vaginal infections, infertility, uterine fibroids, incontinence, complications of menstruation and cancer in the reproductive organs.

There are many gynecological treatments used to care for such complications. Some problems are remedied using non-surgical techniques, such as administration of contraception for painful menstrual cramps and heavy bleeding. However, a majority of gynecological complications are treated surgically. Hysterectomies, tubal ligations and dilation and curettage are all examples of common surgeries performed by gynecologists.

**Choosing a Gynecologist**

Although some primary care physicians provide gynecological services, choosing a doctor who specializes in gynecology will result in care from a doctor specifically trained and experienced in women’s health care. Board-certified gynecologists have completed and passed the gynecological written and oral exams given by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology.