



## **The Use of Chaperones during Sensitive Examinations and Treatments**

AWHONN supports the right of a woman to request and have a chaperone present during sensitive examinations and treatments. Sensitive physical examinations and treatments are generally those that include the female reproductive and sexual organs, that may be perceived as potentially threatening to a woman's sense of privacy or modesty, or that may induce feelings of vulnerability or embarrassment. Health care providers should be aware that a woman's cultural and religious beliefs might necessitate the presence of a chaperone or same gender provider.

The decision to use a chaperone during a sensitive exam or treatment should be made by the patient with the examiner (whether a physician or nurse) as part of an individualized plan of care. The chaperone may be another health care provider, such as a nurse, or a friend or family member, depending on the woman's preference and/or facility protocol.

### **Background**

Factors that may influence a woman's decision to have a chaperone present or that may be considered in determining the best person for this role may include:

- A woman's request for a chaperone
- Protection of the legal rights of the patient and the examiner
- Urgency of the exam or treatment
- Type of examination or treatment performed
- Cultural or religious beliefs
- Age of the woman
- Mental health or cognitive ability of the woman
- Facility protocol
- History of sexual assault or dysfunction
- Availability of a friend or family member to be present as a chaperone if acceptable to the woman

*Approved by the AWHONN Board, November 2001. Reaffirmed by the AWHONN Board, June 2007.*