Gulf Coast Medical Center Designated Baby-Friendly
Hospital Earns Recognition by Prioritizing Breastfeeding

(Fort Myers, Fla. – March 28, 2018) --- Gulf Coast Medical Center received prestigious international recognition from Baby-Friendly USA when the hospital was named a Designated Baby-Friendly birth facility.

Baby-Friendly USA, Inc. is the United States authority for the implementation of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), a global program sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The initiative encourages and recognizes hospitals and birthing centers that offer an optimal level of care for breastfeeding mothers and their babies. Based on the *Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding*, this prestigious international award recognizes birth facilities that offer breastfeeding mothers the information, confidence and skills they need to successfully initiate and continue breastfeeding their babies.

There are more than 20,000 designated Baby-Friendly hospitals and birth centers worldwide. Currently there are 502 active Baby-Friendly hospitals and birth centers in the United States.

"According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the hospital experience is critical for women who intend to breastfeed," says Julie Harney, Nurse Manager, Maternal/Child Services at Gulf Coast Medical Center. "Mothers must be supported immediately after birth to establish breastfeeding, which gives infants the best start in achieving a healthy life, including a reduced risk for obesity. Earning the Baby-Friendly designation is validation for the work we do to support breastfeeding moms and babies."

The "Baby-Friendly" re-designation is given after a rigorous on-site survey is completed. The award is maintained by continuing to practice the *Ten Steps* as demonstrated by quality processes.

To learn more about the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, visit www.babyfriendlyusa.org.

About Lee Health

Since the opening of the first hospital in 1916, Lee Health has been a health care leader in Southwest Florida, constantly evolving to meet the needs of the community. A non-profit, integrated health care services organization, Lee Health is committed to the well-being of every individual served, focused on healthy living and maintaining good health. Staffed by caring people, inspiring health, services are conveniently located throughout the community in four acute care hospitals, two specialty hospitals, outpatient centers, walk-in medical centers, primary care and specialty physician practices and other services across the continuum of care. Formerly known as Lee Memorial Health System, the organization began its second century of service with a new name in 2016. Learn more at www.LeeHealth.org.