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Atherotech's cholesterol test lauded for diagnostic capabilities

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A diagnostic test developed in Birmingham to identify cardiovascular risk factors is being adopted by some obstetricians and gynecologists to assist in early detection of an ovarian syndrome that affects between 5 percent and 10 percent of women of childbearing age.

Birmingham-based **Atherotech Inc.** markets the Vertical Auto Profile, or VAP, Test, which is designed to provide information on cholesterol subclasses. The company says this information enables a more accurate determination of risks associated with cardiovascular disease.

Atherotech officials claim the simple blood test - the cost of which is reimbursed by most insurance companies and Medicare - identifies up to 90 percent of people at risk for heart disease, compared with 40 percent when standard cholesterol tests are used.

Now, researchers have begun exploring alternative applications for the diagnostic tool. For instance, Dr. Steven Foley of Advanced Gynecology in Colorado Springs, Colo., says the VAP Test can play an important role in the diagnosis of polycystic ovarian syndrome, also known as PCOS, a disease that is notoriously difficult to diagnose.

Use of the VAP Test, Foley says in a written statement released through Atherotech, can decrease the amount of time and money patients spend seeking a diagnosis because the expanded cholesterol test includes measurements for "good cholesterol" subclasses HDL2 and HDL3.

"It can be difficult to determine in a 13-year-old patient whether she is just a bit overweight, suffering from premenarche pudginess, or has PCOS," Foley said in the statement. "VAP Test results have shown a correlation between patients who have PCOS and low levels of HDL2."

Left untreated, PCOS can lead to a benign overgrowth of the uterine lining or even cancer. The Atherotech release says women with PCOS are also at higher risk for developing diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Once PCOS is identified, a simple treatment plan can be started, including treatment of elevated insulin and attention to infertility issues.

The VAP technology was patented by Dr. Jere Segrest when he served as director of the **University of Alabama at Birmingham**'s Atherosclerosis Research Unit. In 1999, Segrest sold the startup company to a group of investors headed by Atherotech's current CEO, Roseanne Varner.

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