

No Butts About It – We're Going Smoke-Free

November 18 marks campus-wide campaign

No one has said it would be easy, not even the hospitals in our region who have already taken the plunge. What other hospitals are saying is that making a hospital campus tobacco smoke free can be done, and that many of the issues that we fear will not be as bad as we think.

That's encouraging news for the team that is looking at every angle of the smoking issue, planning for Mission's intention to make all of Mission's properties tobacco smoke free on November 18, Great American Smokeout Day.

The following is an attempt to address some frequently asked questions about Mission's intention to create a smoke-free campus. Many answers are still up in the air as we finalize policies and processes.

WHAT DOES CAMPUS-WIDE SMOKE FREE MEAN?

That means that there will be no smoking on any property owned by Mission Hospitals. That will include all off-site properties that we own or operate including clinics and Spruce Pine Hospital. The new policy will include employees, physicians, contractors, visitors and patients.

WHO IS PARTICIPATING IN THIS INITIATIVE?

Our neighbors at MAHEC support our smoke-free environment (SFE) and the Buncombe County Medical Society has also offered us their support.

WHY NOW?

“We know from CDC data that 1 in 5 deaths are related to smoking,” says Donna Borowski of Nicotine Cessation and a member of the Smoke-Free Task Team. “Every day we counsel patients with COPD and other diseases related to smoking. It just doesn't make sense for Mission to enable smokers who then create a cloud of second-hand smoke right outside our entrances.”

Two hospitals, Pardee in Hendersonville and Highlands Cashiers in Cashiers, have already gone campus-wide smoke free. Others in the region are looking at Mission, as the largest hospital in the region, to set a wellness example they can model. Mission Hospitals Administration has made a commitment to wellness, and believes that modeling healthy behaviors is important to the health of our patients, staff and the community.

We are actually long overdue for this change. The Mayo Clinic and its holdings have been smoke-free environments since 1987. One by one, hospitals around the country are going totally smoke free.

A survey taken at this past October's Benefits Fair by the Nicotine Cessation Program indicated that if the Hospitals decided to go 100% tobacco free, 79.1% of the staff would support the change, 18.6% were against it and 2.3% said they were unsure. It's clear that the majority of Mission staffers are ready for this initiative.

WHY CAN'T WE JUST KEEP THINGS THE WAY THEY ARE ?

“Despite our best efforts, we have been unable to protect our patients, visitors and non-smoking staff members from second-hand smoke,” says Bill Mance, vice president of Human Resources and chair of the Smoke-Free Task Team. “Second-hand smoke is a problem everywhere. It is a constant source of complaints.”

The truth is, this is nothing new. As far back as 1993, Mission, St. Joseph's and Thoms Hospitals declared themselves smoke-free, although the policy has not really been enforced until now.

Providing a place to smoke, i.e., smoking areas, doesn't support our primary goal to become totally smoke-free and create a healthier environment for our patients, families and employees. We want to effectively eliminate the "triggers" – like smoking areas – that make smoking cessation difficult. To maintain these areas is like giving tacit approval of smoking, not the message we want to project.

WHY IS SMOKING BEING TARGETED VERSUS OTHER HEALTH RISKS?

Tobacco use is the number one cause of preventable death, as well as preventable disease in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 440,000 people die prematurely each year from smoking related diseases. This is more than alcohol, cocaine, crack, heroin, homicide, suicide, car crashes, fires and AIDS combined.

- Smoking is a factor in heart disease, cancer, stroke and lung disease.
- Smoking costs the United States approximately \$150 billion each year in healthcare and lost productivity.
- Patients who smoke regularly before surgery have twice the risk of wound infections as non-smokers.
- A smoker's broken bones take almost twice as long to heal as a non-smoker's.
- Many people are not aware how smoking impacts healthcare and recovery. By making our environment smoke-free, we are addressing the number one health risk today.

HOW WILL THE POLICY BE ENFORCED?

The policy is still being refined, but will be based on the disciplinary steps we would take if a person used alcohol on Mission premises in violation of our policies. Once the policy is approved, our staff will have ample time to study it and ask questions about it.

WON'T THIS POLICY JUST SEND THE SMOKERS TO RESTROOMS, STAIRWELLS AND THEIR CARS?

While the potential exists, the hope is that all of our staff will embrace the efforts to sustain a healthier environment for patients, families, and employees. The smell of smoke is a trigger for those trying to quit or remain smoke-free while they are here. It is our responsibility to help each other, our patients, and visitors in this process.

GIVEN THE NURSING SHORTAGE, AREN'T YOU AFRAID THAT MANY STAFF MEMBERS WILL LEAVE MISSION RATHER THAN STOP SMOKING?

Some staff members may choose to seek other employment rather than adhere to the new policy. We have heard from hospitals that have already adopted a SFE that the impact on their staffing has been minimal.

People applying for positions at Mission will be told up-front that we have a campus-wide smoke free policy.

GIVEN THE STRESS THAT FAMILIES FACE DURING HOSPITALIZATION, HOW DOES THIS POLICY REFLECT OUR MERIT CORE VALUES?

Our intent is to intervene, educate, and heal through smoking cessation resources that will assist patients and family members when they are here. Specifically we plan to offer nicotine replacements and literature for visitors who must cope with their addiction while they are on the grounds and do what we can to support our patients and visitors while they are here.

The majority of smokers, no matter their level of dependence, recognize that smoking at a hospital is counter-intuitive. Most will comply with our policy, however we will train staff members in ways that they can gently confront visitors who fail to comply and help relieve stress by offering alternatives to smoking.

HOW ARE WE EDUCATING PATIENTS, VISITORS AND THE PUBLIC?

Between now and through the rest of the year, we will create and provide information and educational materials that will be distributed throughout our campuses and on our website. We will work closely with physician offices to provide information to patients and their families. There will be more stories in the media. You will see signs at the perimeter of the campus and at all entrances.

While we will make every effort to inform patients and their family members prior to their admission, we can expect that many patients and their families will arrive unprepared for a hospitalization experience with no coping mechanism. Nicotine Cessation staff will meet with these patients to provide SFE information and cessation assistance as needed. We will also educate our staff members in ways to interact with patients and their family members who are having difficulty adhering to the policy.

SUPPOSE I CHOOSE TO QUIT?

Recognizing that smoking is an addiction and not always a choice, Mission is committed to providing help for staff members, patients and visitors who want to quit or help to control their nicotine dependence while they are on campus.

Mission's Nicotine Cessation Program is gearing up for extra classes and one-to-one counseling for staff members who want to get started now. All you have to do is contact Donna Borowski or Mary Byrd at 213-0292. They can help you choose a method that will fit your lifestyle while giving you the best outcome. The Smoke-Free Task Team is discussing offering free or reduced price nicotine replacement therapies to smokers for a period of time. There may even be monetary incentives and prizes for staff members who quit. You'll hear more about that as plans develop.

If you feel that you want to use November 18 to quit smoking altogether, go ahead and contact Donna or Mary now. Depending on the method of cessation you choose, it could take you several weeks to totally stop smoking. You don't want to wait until November 18.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO QUIT?

Smoking on campus won't be an option. You can either contact Nicotine Cessation so that they can help you find a way to deal with your addiction while you are here, or you will need to leave campus to smoke. Since MAHEC is our partner in this effort, their campus will also be smoke-free.

Mission is not in the business of forcing people to quit smoking, but to assist those who want to quit or who want to control their dependence while they are here.

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