



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 19, 2008

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**Community Hospital, Family Health West, and St. Mary's Hospital
to become Tobacco Free campuses on March 1, 2009**

(Grand Junction, Colorado) - The CEO's of Community Hospital, Family Health West, and St. Mary's Hospital & Regional Medical Center are pleased to announce that all three facilities will implement a Tobacco Free policy on March 1, 2009.

"As healthcare institutions dedicated to providing quality healthcare, maintaining healing environments, and improving the health of our patients and community, we join 38 other Colorado hospitals and over 500 hospitals and clinics nationally in making our campuses tobacco free," says Chris Thomas, Community Hospital President and CEO.

Serious health issues related to tobacco use are widely recognized today. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Office, more deaths are caused by tobacco use than by alcohol, cocaine, crack, heroin, homicides, suicides, automobile accidents, fires, and AIDS combined. Smoking also slows the body's healing process and increases the risk of infection.

"Eliminating tobacco use on hospital campuses will improve the care environment and ultimately improve patient care," says Dennis Ficklin, CEO Family Health West. "We are using tomorrow's Great American Smoke-Out as an opportunity to announce our tobacco free efforts and encourage Mesa County residents to reduce tobacco usage.

As of March 1, 2009, use of any tobacco products will no longer be allowed on hospital-owned property, including parking lots.

This policy is not and should not be a deterrent to getting care. If someone is a tobacco user, they do not have to quit in order to receive care at any of these hospitals. Upon admission, patients are encouraged to notify the admissions staff that they use tobacco. This information will be forwarded to their physician who can make arrangements to provide them with tobacco-abatement products or discuss alternative resources.

Community Hospital, Family Health West, and St. Mary's Hospital are pleased to adopt the Tobacco Free policy. "We recognize that having tobacco free environments is key to better health for our patients, says Bob Ladenburger, St. Mary's Hospital President and CEO. "Please join us in working together to improve the health of our community.

(END)



Tobacco Free Campus Frequently Asked Questions

What does a tobacco-free environment mean?

Effective March 1, 2009, smoking and the use of tobacco products of any kind will not be permitted on any property owned or leased by Community Hospital, Family Health West, or St. Mary's Hospital. The policy applies to employees, volunteers, physicians, contractors, visitors, and patients.

Why are Community Hospital, Family Health West, and St. Mary's Hospital going tobacco free?

As healthcare organizations, we are committed to creating a healthier environment for everyone who comes on our campuses. Community Hospital, St. Mary's Hospital, and Family Health West, join 38 other Colorado hospitals and more than 500 hospitals nationwide in becoming tobacco-free. As healthcare organizations committed to our missions to improve the health and wellness of the communities we serve, we have a responsibility to take a leadership role on this major health issue.

- Smoking slows the body's healing process and increases the risk of wound infection.
- Patients who smoke before surgery have an increased risk of complications.
- Approximately 16,000 Coloradans die each year from cancer, heart disease, stroke and chronic lower respiratory disease. An estimated one-quarter of these deaths were due to smoking.
- Annual healthcare costs in Colorado attributable to smoking are estimated at \$1.3 billion by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Why can't individuals smoke outside of a building?

Second-hand smoke has been proven hazardous to people's health. Providing a place to smoke does not support our goal of creating a tobacco-free, healthy environment.

Can individuals smoke in their cars?

No, smoking or tobacco use of any kind will not be permitted on any property owned or leased by our three hospitals, including parking lots. If your automobile is in a hospital parking lot, you will not be permitted to smoke in your car.

Do employees, patients, and visitors have to quit using tobacco?

Our decision to go tobacco-free is not an attempt to force anyone to quit smoking. Rather, the tobacco-free initiative is a concrete way we can demonstrate our ongoing commitment to healthy living. The policy simply means tobacco use is not permitted on the hospitals' campuses.

What about individual rights?

We are not asking individuals to stop the use of tobacco products but to refrain from tobacco use on the hospital's campuses. Tobacco use is a personal choice that is respected. However, we do have the legal right to ban tobacco use on our property.

What will the hospitals do to help patients, visitors, and employees who use tobacco products?

We will be informing all groups about the availability of free resources such as the Colorado Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW. We will also provide information about local resources including smoking cessation classes.

How do patients who use tobacco products seek help?

During the admission process, patients should simply notify the registration staff or admissions nurse that they use tobacco. We will work with their physician to make arrangements to provide them with nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or to discuss alternative resources to cope in the tobacco-free environment. Assistance will be given to patients throughout their stay.

What about patients who are having a difficult time without the use of tobacco products?

Our intent is to intervene, educate, and support the healing process through tobacco cessation resources that will assist patients and family members when they are receiving our services. Patients will have the option of receiving NRT during their hospitalization. NRT will also be available to family members, visitors, and staff.

Will employees be expected to ask people to stop using tobacco products?

Yes. We understand that visitors to our campuses are frequently under stress, which increases the desire to smoke. A community awareness campaign will help educate consumers and give them time to adjust to the policy change. There will undoubtedly be instances where patients or visitors might not agree with the policy. Our goal is to improve the health of all who come to our hospitals. Cards will be available for employees, volunteers, and security personnel to hand to anyone using a tobacco product. The card will politely remind individuals about the policy and the resources are available to them.

Where can I get more information about the new policy?

The policies and other helpful information will be posted on hospital websites and intranets.

What can happen to an employee who does not follow the tobacco-free policy?

Violations of the tobacco-use policy will be handled like all other standards or policies. Employees can contact their Human Resources departments to learn how violations will be handled.

Tobacco cessation resources

Fresh Start - A four-week tobacco cessation group program, free of charge for hospital employees and their family members, offered January 7 - 28, 5 p.m., at Community Hospital. To register call Mary Vernon, at 256-6210.

Colorado Quitline - A direct link to Colorado's telephone and online quit program. Free personalized support and quit plan. Free nicotine patches. www.coquitline.org, 1-800-784-8669

Freedom from Smoking - The American Lung Association sponsors this free online smoking cessation program. www.lungsusa.org

Smokefree.gov - A free on-line program and resources. www.smokefree.gov.

"You Can Quit" - A four-week tobacco cessation class offered by the Mesa County Tobacco Education Council and St. Mary's Regional Cancer Center. Classes are offered on Tuesdays, 6:30 -7:30 p.m., at St. Mary's Advanced Medicine Pavilion. Cost is \$25 cash. To register, or for a quit kit, call Cathie Nicholson, at 254-4108.

Spit Tobacco: A Guide for Quitting - Free online guide to quit chew tobacco. www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/SpitTobacco/SpitTobaccoAGuideforQuitting.