

TOBACCO-FREE CAMPUS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



A breath of fresh air

Hill Country Memorial Health System properties are tobacco free effective Nov. 15, 2007, the date of the Great American Smokeout.

Given everything we know about the dangers of tobacco and second-hand smoke, it would be inconsistent with our mission to continue to allow the use of tobacco products anywhere on our property. We respect that our employees, patients and visitors have a right to use tobacco, but we are going to ask them not to use tobacco while on our property.

Because of the known and documented health hazards associated with using tobacco, we want to be proactive in helping those employees and patients who want to stop using tobacco to achieve that goal.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Why is Hill Country Memorial Health System tobacco free?

A: As the major provider of health care in our community, our mission is to create a healthy environment for everyone who comes on our campus. We believe we are setting a positive example for the community with genuine concern for everyone's health. Non-smoking patients, visitors and staff are entitled to smoke-free, litter-free areas surrounding health system facility entrances and other public spaces. In addition, the City of Fredericksburg now prohibits smoking in all public places within the city limits.

Q: What does "tobacco free" mean?

A: Effective Nov. 15, 2007, using tobacco of any kind on our property is against the health system's official policy.

Q: Where on campus does the tobacco-free ban apply? Is smoking allowed inside cars?

A: Smoking is prohibited on all areas of the campus, inside and outside, including inside cars that are parked on health system property.

Q: Why was a ban on tobacco chosen rather than a ban on other health risks?

A: Smoking is the leading preventable cause of disease and death in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in five deaths is related to tobacco use. Through second-hand smoke, smoking has the additional feature of being harmful to those who are near the person engaging in the harmful behavior.

Q: Why can't we have smoking huts that are in selective outdoor locations?

A: Allowing smoking, even in designated areas, does not support our goal of being



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Caring for the Texas Hill Country

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tobacco free which is necessary to create a healthier environment for our patients, visitors, employees and volunteers. Providing a place to smoke runs counter to the very purpose of our health system which is to promote and support good health. In addition, the elimination of smoking areas removes triggers that make smoking cessation more difficult.

Q: Isn't smoking a personal legal right?

A: There is no such thing as a legal right to smoke on someone else's property. We are not asking employees, visitors and patients to stop smoking but to refrain from smoking while visiting or working at Hill Country Memorial Hospital and other health system facilities. Recent court rulings maintain that tobacco users are not entitled to protection against discrimination as disabled persons. Tobacco users are addicted to the nicotine, not the delivery device, such as cigarettes.

Q: What kind of support is Hill Country Memorial Health System providing for employees who smoke?

A: The health system is providing a variety of smoking cessation programs for those employees who choose to stop, including smoking cessation classes taught by Lou Dieter, support groups, nicotine replacement therapy and prescription Chantix.

Q: Isn't banning tobacco on the hospital campus going to anger visitors and patients who want to smoke, especially in times of extreme stress?

A: The majority of our patients, visitors and staff are non-smokers, and they are entitled to smoke-free, litter-free areas surrounding Hill Country Memorial Hospital entrances and other public spaces. Our patients and visitors also are entitled to interactions with staff without encountering the odors associated with smoking lingering on that staff member's clothes and hair. As for relieving stress, studies have consistently shown that nicotine does not ease stress. In fact, it has the opposite effect: nicotine stimulates the "flight or fight response," increasing heart rate, blood pressure, respiration and muscle tension.

Q: What kind of support is the health system providing to visitors who smoke?

A: Nicotine replacement in the form of gum is available to visitors and may be purchased at the Prescription Lab Pharmacy in the Perry-Feller Professional Building. Pharmacy hours are 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Q: What kind of support is the health system providing to inpatients who smoke?

A: Medications can be prescribed for patients to assist them to remain smoke-free during hospitalization. All patients are evaluated for tobacco use during the admission process. Those patients who indicate they are smokers will receive smoking cessation education along with counseling by a nurse regarding smoking cessation, if desired.

Q: How will the tobacco-free policy be enforced? What if someone refuses to comply, and continues to smoke?

A: All members of our staff are accountable and responsible for utilizing appropriate protocol for occasions when they learn of any person smoking on our campus. Enforcement of our tobacco-free policy should be conducted in a serious but friendly and non-judgmental manner. We are providing information cards so employees can feel more comfortable approaching in a diplomatic way people



who are violating the policy. Studies have shown that most smokers will comply immediately with the tobacco-free policy when informed about it. In difficult situations, employees are encouraged to contact the administrator on call.

Visitors

Visitors may be unfamiliar with our policy and should be politely told that use of tobacco products is prohibited on our campus for the health of everyone. The following options should be offered: advise the visitor to leave the campus to smoke, or direct the visitor to the Prescription Lab Pharmacy in the Perry-Feller Professional Building for nicotine replacement gum between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 6 p.m., Monday-Friday. There are more than 600 employees in the health system, and none should remain silent when in the presence of someone smoking on campus.

Patients

At the time of admission or pre-admission, patients are advised of the health system's tobacco-free policy and invited to talk to their physician if they are concerned about being able to comply with the policy. Those patients wanting to smoke should be informed that nicotine replacement therapy or other prescription options are available to them.

Staff

Employees who fail to comply with the health system's tobacco-free policy will be subject to progressive counseling up to and including termination.

Tobacco-free Task Force

If you have other questions or need assistance with any aspect of our tobacco-free policy, you may speak with a member of the Tobacco-free Task Force:

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