

Up in Smoke: Tobacco-Free Policies Eliminate Smoking on Hospital Grounds

Issue

Patients in hospital gowns, IV's attached and oxygen tanks in tow dragging on the last inch of a cigarette while standing outside the entrance to a hospital is always an incredulous sight. It is one mind-boggling enough to make passers by gawk to see such a display of complete disregard for the rampant health hazards of tobacco use at a place where healing and wellness are supposed to be top priorities.

Unfortunately, until a few months ago this scene was not uncommon on hospital campuses throughout South Carolina. Smoking is the single greatest preventable cause of disease and death, according to the U.S. Surgeon General. In the report, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*, our nation's top public health official concluded, "that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke."

Intervention

In the wake of the Surgeon General's June 2006 report, The Division of Tobacco Prevention and Control at the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control employed various strategies to reduce secondhand smoke exposure. One key action included promoting adoption of 100 percent tobacco-free policies in hospital buildings and grounds throughout the state. Specific tactics included:

- Developing a model 100 percent tobacco-free policy for healthcare facilities to ensure a tobacco-free environment for all employees, contractors and visitors within buildings, vehicles, grounds and at all sponsored events;
- Creating and using a toolkit to help facilities successfully adopt and implement policies;
- Serving as a consultant and resident expert on secondhand smoke. Staff members attended hospital board meetings, met with transitional teams and were generally "on call" to assist hospitals as they converted to 100 percent tobacco-free campuses;
- Working with partners such as the S.C. Tobacco Collaborative and the S.C. Hospital Association to promote policy adoption; and
- Producing and distributing a map to pinpoint the number and location of tobacco-free hospitals in South Carolina.

Impact

Thanks to the above efforts, many S.C. hospitals have realized the importance of adopting and enforcing 100 percent tobacco-free policies for their buildings AND grounds to help ensure protection from secondhand smoke exposure and relay a positive health message. Results include:

- Thirty-five hospitals implemented a 100% tobacco-free policy for their campuses, completely eliminating secondhand smoke exposure for thousands of hospital employees, contractors, patients, and visitors each year;
- The S.C. Hospital Association recently passed a resolution encouraging all hospitals to go smoke-free in buildings and on grounds by November 2007;
- More than 10 hospitals are considering strengthening tobacco-free policies by November 2007;
- Cessation services and referrals are an integral component of new policy changes.

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