

Straight Talk

A weekly update from management on the issues that matter most



August 6, 2009

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

All NCH campuses and facilities are going **tobacco-free** on November 19, 2009. Let me explain why.

First, we're setting an appropriate example. Our overriding mission as a healthcare system is to "*promote, maintain and restore health for those we serve.*" That's what this campaign—in which we are joined by neighboring hospitals Physicians Regional Medical Center and Lee Memorial—is all about.

Second, smoking kills. Cigarettes are responsible for one in five deaths in America today. Smoking is the most common cause of premature death contributing to about 20% of the overall cost of healthcare. This habit is also as addictive as cocaine or heroin. In the U.S. today, 24% of men and 18% of women are addicted to smoking, according to the most recent National Health Interview Survey by the National Center for Health Statistics. Here at NCH, we estimate that about 14% of our colleagues currently smoke.

Our nation could probably almost cure the health care cost crisis and the recession if smoking were eliminated. According to the American Heart Association and the American Lung Association, of the 46 million Americans who smoke, at least 80% say they want to quit. Even President Obama has joined the ranks of those who have either quit smoking or are trying hard to quit. The use of tobacco is banned in the White House, and President Obama chewed nicotine gum during the campaign. This is a wonderful change, since we need a healthy President who sets a good example.

More than a million people stop smoking each year. When you quit, your risk of heart disease drops in half after one year. After 15 years of abstinence, your risk drops to that of a non-smoker. Stroke risk drops similarly. Men and women in their thirties who quit smoking can add five and three years, respectively, to their lives.

So how can we help our community stop this destructive addiction? First, we need to be compassionate and mindful that our role is to help patients, families and our colleagues stop using tobacco—not to punish, but to assist.

Nicotine replacement products and the prescriptions for anti-smoking drugs, Welbutrin and Chantix, are covered through our Express Scripts drug plan if prescribed by a physician. In addition, alternative therapies such as acupuncture and hypnosis are also covered through flex spending accounts. With time and support, a motivated person can gradually decrease intake of nicotine and overcome the addiction.

Free smoking cessation support is available through Florida Quitline, the state of Florida's 24/7 support and counseling initiative (877-822-6669 or www.flquitline.com/); American Lung Association (www.ffsonline.org); Collier County Health Department's Smoking Cessation five-week program (252-6852); and for NCH colleagues only, NCH Horizon Health for five free counseling sessions per year.

Scott Wiley, our Director of Respiratory Care, is leading our effort to provide smoking cessation support in order to become *smoke free* on November 19. In addition to offering employees nicotine replacement products, we will sponsor behavioral modification, group classes, and health coaches. By stopping smoking, colleagues will have access to better value and less cost in their health plans.

Our goal, again, is to provide compassionate help so that colleagues can break this habit once and for all. Stated simply, by joining the over 1,000 American hospitals that are already smoke-free, we'll be saving lives.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Allen".

Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added.