

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

St. John's Hospital, Clinics to Provide Tobacco-Free Environment

Berryville, AR—(September 15, 2005)—For the health and safety of its patients, guests and co-workers and in compliance with Arkansas Act #134, St. John's Hospital – Berryville will provide – effective October 1, 2005 – a tobacco-free environment in all of its campus and offsite facilities and on all affiliated properties, including area clinics, ambulance stations and parking lots.

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States and implementation of the totally tobacco-free policy will eliminate second-hand smoke, reduce fire hazard and create a healthier environment overall. This new policy will affect patients, co-workers, volunteers, physicians, contractors and visitors.

Arkansas Act #134, which was passed by the state legislature earlier this year and takes effect on October 1st, makes it illegal to use tobacco products on the grounds or inside of all Arkansas hospitals and medical facilities owned by the hospitals. This tobacco ban also applies to privately-owned vehicles on hospital property including parking areas. Violation of the law is a Class C misdemeanor.

“According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in five deaths are related to tobacco use and more than 440,000 people die prematurely each year of tobacco-related diseases,” noted David Dennis, St. John's President. “That's more deaths than all those caused by alcohol, cocaine, crack, heroin, homicide, suicide, automobile accidents, fire and AIDS combined. In addition to the loss of life, tobacco usage costs the US approximately \$97.2 billion each year in healthcare expenses and lost productivity, and in Arkansas alone, an extra \$413 million in healthcare costs are incurred as a result of tobacco-related illnesses.”

Michele Gann, Vice President of Patient Care Services, added, “We counsel patients with heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other diseases related to tobacco use daily. It just doesn't make sense for us to enable smokers, who then create second-hand smoke outside our entrances. Patients who use tobacco regularly have twice the risk of wound infections after surgery and their wounds and broken bones take almost twice as long to heal. As the only acute care hospital and one of the largest employers in the area, St. John's has a responsibility to set a wellness example. Being a role model for healthy behavior is important to the health of our patients, co-workers and community.”

More and more hospitals across the nation are opting to provide a tobacco-free environment. Since 1987, many hospitals throughout the country have gone totally smoke-free, and with this new law, hospitals in Arkansas will take a huge step in the promotion of healthcare.

“Our intent is to inform, educate and assist co-workers, patients and family members when they are here through tobacco cessation resources,” Gann said. “Specifically, we plan to offer single-use nicotine replacements and information about tobacco cessation programs to patients and their visitors who must cope with their addiction while they are on the grounds. In addition, we are offering free tobacco cessation products and medications to our co-workers who wish to quit. The majority of tobacco users, no matter what their level of dependence, recognize that tobacco and healthcare just don’t go together.”

St. John’s is posting signs at the perimeter of the campus, at all entrances, and throughout their facilities. Maps will be available to identify hospital and clinic properties and adjacent properties that are joining the hospital in providing a tobacco-free environment.

“In recognizing that tobacco use is a very powerful addiction, St. John’s is committed to supporting our co-workers, patients and visitors who want to quit or control their nicotine dependence while on campus,” Dennis emphasized. “We are not in the business of forcing people to quit, but using tobacco on campus cannot be an option.”

For more information on St. John’s tobacco-free policy, please call St. John’s Human Resources office at 423-5232. To find options on how to quit using tobacco, call the SOS Quit Line at 1-866-NOW-QUIT, or visit their website at www.stampoutsmoking.com.