

COULEE MEDICAL CENTER Announces New Tobacco-Free Policies

GRAND COULEE – COULEE MEDICAL CENTER today announced plans to implement a new tobacco-free policy at all facilities, effective November 1, 2010.

Hospital leaders say the new policy reflects the health system's mission: "We are eliminating tobacco-use on our properties to provide a healthy and safe environment for employees, patients and visitors and to promote positive health behaviors," said Scott Graham, Chief Executive Officer at Coulee Medical Center.

The new policy bans the use of all tobacco products, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes and smokeless tobacco, within all properties owned, leased, or occupied by Coulee Medical Center. This includes parking lots, hospital vehicles, and employees' personal vehicles parked on the premises. Employees are prohibited from using tobacco products during working hours.

The US Surgeon General's Office in 1964 declared that smoking is hazardous to health. Yet smoking remains the number one cause of preventable death and disability, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

Coulee Medical Center views tobacco-use as a quality concern: "We can no longer turn a blind eye to on-campus smoking when we know that continued tobacco-use can cause problems for a patient," said Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Jacob Chaffee. "Smoking retards wound healing, increases infection rates in surgeries, and is the most common cause of poor birth outcomes."

Furthermore, three-fourths of all tobacco-users say they want to quit. But the Coulee Medical Center medical director recognizes the challenge of breaking the addiction to nicotine and respects an individual's quitting process. "We are not telling anyone 'you must quit smoking.'" Said Dr. Chaffee. "We are saying, 'Don't use tobacco at our hospital.' While you are a patient or visitor at this hospital, we can suggest ways to ease nicotine withdrawal symptoms. And if you are ready to quit, we have trained professionals and resources who can help you."

Coulee Medical Center hopes hospital employees will help inform visitors and patients about the new policy, said Scott Graham, CEO. "This will not be easy," he said, "but it's central to our continuing efforts to make an excellent place to work and to receive health care." In implementing the new tobacco ban, the hospital plans to offer symptom relief or tobacco-cessation treatment to interested staff, visitors and patients.