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# Strand hospitals ban smoking

## Facilities to offer cessation classes in future policy shift

**By Jenny Burns - The Sun News**

All Grand Strand hospitals announced Tuesday they will become tobacco-free campuses inside and outside the hospital as a way to promote healthy living.

That means Georgetown's two hospitals as well as Conway Medical Center, Grand Strand Regional Medical Center and Loris Healthcare System - and the medical buildings they own - will no longer have designated places outside for employees, physicians, patients and visitors to smoke.

The Georgetown Hospital System will go smoke-free on Nov. 15, the date of the Great American Smokeout. The three in Horry County will go smoke-free on Jan. 1.

"It's time for hospitals to do what's right," said Arnold Green, chief operating officer of Loris Healthcare System.

Hospital leaders say they know Horry County is a strong tobacco region, but hospitals should lead the way in setting an example for how to live a healthy life.

"We have to do more than be a fix-it shop," said Philip A. Clayton, chief executive officer of Conway Medical Center.

The hospitals are following the lead of 27 others in South Carolina that have already gone tobacco-free. The S.C. Hospital Association passed a resolution encouraging the state's hospitals to go smoke-free in December.

Bruce Bailey, chairman of the association and Georgetown Hospital System's chief executive officer, said all the Strand hospitals met and agreed going smoke-free together was the way to go.

Nearly 6,000 South Carolinians each year "die a preventable death" from smoking-related diseases, Bailey said.

The hospitals hope the new policy will encourage employees and the public to quit smoking. The hospitals are offering smoking cessation classes and are looking at covering the cost for quit-assist prescriptions for employees as well as alternative medicine options.

They said they realize this will be a major change for many, and plan to educate medical staff on ways to explain the policy to visitors.

"The biggest problem will be tourists" who won't know about the policy, said Joan Carroza, spokeswoman for Grand Strand Regional Medical Center.

Hospitals say the change will take a lot of front end work - notifying new job applicants of the policy, putting up signs and educating staff on how to handle the public.

Hospital employees have mixed reactions about the switch.

Some fully support the prohibition and others say they understand the reason for the policy, but think they should be allowed to smoke outside, away from the building where they aren't harming others.

One nurse at Grand Strand Regional said she would consider quitting smoking if the hospital did implement a program to pay for prescription aids, but others said it wouldn't keep them from smoking.

Anne Joyner, who was visiting her mother in the hospital, said she agreed with the policy because when she was a patient she didn't like that she wasn't allowed to smoke and the nurses could.

"I gave them [heck] for three days," she said.

**Contact JENNY BURNS at 626-0305 or [jeburns@thesunnews.com](mailto:jeburns@thesunnews.com).**