

For More Information call:

Rebecka Zemlock, Marketing/Public Relations Director
325-947-6647

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Declaration of Independence

This Fourth of July, San Angelo Community Medical Center (SACMC) has an extra reason to celebrate: The hospital is declaring its campus independent from tobacco.

The new policy means no tobacco products can be used on hospital property, including the building and surrounding areas of Community Medical Associates and West Texas Medical Associates. Until now, people have been able to smoke in outdoor spaces on campus.

Brad Holland, chief executive officer of SACMC, said the decision to go tobacco-free is serious for the hospital, and planning for the switch has been six months in the making.

“As a main health-care provider in West Texas, we have a responsibility to take action, to be the leader in helping people take control of their health,” Holland said. “We are here not only to provide comfort and care when individuals become sick or injured, but to promote health and wellness.”

Over 1,658 hospitals are 100 percent smoke-free campuses, according to the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation. SACMC is the first local hospital to adopt a tobacco-free campus policy.

A committee of about 20 managers, non-managers, smokers, non-smokers and physicians gave direction to the tobacco-free initiative. Employees were given the opportunity to join a free smoking cessation program.

On July 7, the hospital will hold an employee cook-out in celebration of independence from tobacco where the “smoke hut,” or gazebo, used to be. The gazebo will be torn down on July 6.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates America spent \$193 billion last year due to illness from smoking. CDC reports more than 50 cancer-causing chemicals are present in secondhand smoke. Every year, an estimated 443,000 people in the U.S. die prematurely from smoking or exposure to smoking.

Employees who smoke bring secondhand smoke into the building on their clothing. For patient care-providers looking after infants, elderly patients or patients with respiratory illness, it can be especially detrimental, Holland said.

For the most part, Holland said, hospital employees have been positive and supportive of the tobacco-free initiative. “We anticipate it being a change that is worth overcoming,” Holland said. “We have implemented policies and trained staff to ease with the transition.”

The hospital's tobacco-free committee recognizes that some people may feel that the new policy is an infringement on their personal rights. However, the committee states the new policy is not intended to control people's choice to smoke outside of the health-care facility, but rather to create a healthier environment for everyone who comes to work, receives care or visits a friend or family member.
