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PITTSBURGH MERCY HEALTH SYSTEM ‘CLEARS THE AIR’
Community-based health and human service nonprofit to become a tobacco-free environment and adopt tobacco-free shifts February 1, 2015

PITTSBURGH (September 15, 2014) – Beginning February 1, 2015, [Pittsburgh Mercy Health System](#) (PMHS), part of CHE Trinity Health, serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, will become a tobacco-free environment and implement tobacco-free work shifts. These measures are consistent with PMHS’ mission and ongoing commitment to provide exceptional, person-centered, wholistic health care; promote a healthy environment; and support employee wellness.

The use of tobacco and related products by PMHS employees, persons served, visitors, volunteers, students, vendors, contractors during work shifts and on properties owned, rented, or leased by PMHS, at organization-sponsored events, and in organization-owned or leased vehicles will be prohibited under PMHS’ new tobacco-free environment and revised drug-free workplace policies. Cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, snus, snuff, pipes, bidis, and devices which contain tobacco and other smoke- or vapor-producing products will not be permitted. E-cigarettes, hookahs, and e-hookahs also are not allowed.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States.

“Pittsburgh Mercy Health System’s mission is to be a transforming and compassionate, healing presence in the communities we serve,” stated **Sister Susan Welsh, RSM**, president and CEO. “We care about the health and well-being of our employees, persons we serve, and the community. These policies will help reduce public exposure to harmful toxins that are associated with tobacco use.”

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PMHS to becomes tobacco-free environment, adopt tobacco-free shifts on February 1, 2015
Page 2 of 2

Sister Susan knows firsthand how difficult it is to quit. After nearly 20 years of smoking, she quit “cold turkey” on February 21, 1991, the same day she was diagnosed with cancer. She has been tobacco free since. Her cancer was successfully treated. It is not known if smoking contributed directly to the type of cancer Sister Susan had; however, “it was an incredible wake-up call. To this day, each time I see a young person light up, I am tempted to share my experience,” she added.

PMHS recognizes the decision to quit tobacco is personal. “We are not compelling anyone to quit tobacco. Rather, our goal is to provide a supportive, healthy environment to employees, persons we serve, and visitors by asking them to refrain from tobacco use their work shift and when visiting our 60+ locations,” stated **Diana K. Siard**, director, Human Resources Department, PMHS. “For those who are thinking about ways to improve their health, this is a tremendous opportunity.”

To allow individuals ample time to prepare for the change, PMHS announced the policies to employees last month, nearly five months ahead of the February 1, 2015 implementation date.

“Tobacco-free environments are healthy environments,” stated **Stephanie Murtaugh**, senior director, Mercy Community Health, the population health division of PMHS. “Stopping tobacco is one of the most important things a person can do to improve their health. PMHS offers exceptional support and has successfully helped hundreds of people stop using tobacco,” she added.

To help support individuals who choose to quit tobacco, PMHS is offering an array of free and highly effective resources including one-to-one, peer, and group education and support from tobacco cessation specialists, online information, health coaching, 24-hour telephone support, employee assistance program (EAP) services, and over-the-counter U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved nicotine replacement therapies, including patches, gum, nasal sprays, oral inhalers, lozenges, and non-nicotine tablets.

About Pittsburgh Mercy Health System

[Pittsburgh Mercy Health System](http://www.pmhs.org) (PMHS), part of CHE Trinity Health, serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, is one of the region’s largest health and social service nonprofits and also one of its largest employers. PMHS includes A Child’s Place at Mercy, McAuley Ministries, Mercy Behavioral Health, Mercy Community Health, Mercy Intellectual Disabilities Services, Mercy Parish Nurse and Health Ministry Program, Operation Safety Net®, and Pittsburgh Mercy Family Health Center. Together, these PMHS programs and their 1,700 employees serve more than 26,000 individuals annually at 60+ locations in Southwestern Pennsylvania. To learn more about PMHS, or to make a donation in support of its important work in the community, visit www.pmhs.org.

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