



## WORKING WITH VISITORS

You have neither a contract with them nor formal authority over their behavior, yet visitors can be your partners in sustaining a smoke-free environment. A visitor who understands and follows your tobacco-use policy can improve a patient's well being during the hospital stay—and maybe even support a quit attempt afterwards. Consider taking these four steps to help build an effective partnership with every visitor who uses tobacco:

1. **Inform the visitor about your tobacco-use policy.**
2. **Respectfully enforce the policy.**
3. **Help visitors manage nicotine cravings and learn about quitting options.**
4. **Provide tools to help staff enforce the policy.**

### 1. Inform the visitor about your tobacco-use policy.

Every visitor that comes to your hospital forms an impression before walking through the door. Consider both the subliminal and direct messages you deliver about tobacco-use.

For starters, remove smoking shelters and ashtrays. Even the most addicted visitor is not likely to question the absence of these vestiges of smoking in a health care facility. It's also a good idea, particularly during the initial stages of your tobacco-free initiative, to sweep up cigarette butts as you find them.

But you can't rely on subtleties to communicate your policy. Provide visible, concise signs that tell visitors they can't smoke. Hospitals report that *clearly communicated* smoke-free policies are largely self-enforcing.<sup>xxiv</sup> Post a 'no smoking' sign at every entryway, exit, parking lot and other area where visitors are likely to smoke. Develop signs in languages that can reach visitors. Almost everyone understands the universal 'No Smoking' symbol.



Experience shows, however, that employees and visitors can become "sign blind" over time. Change your signs so people will notice them.

Give careful thought to the wording, placement and size of your signs. Your investment in effective signage will ease the enforcement of your tobacco-use policy.

> *See [Becoming and Remaining Tobacco-Free, Post Effective Signs, page 7](#)*

### 2. Respectfully enforce the policy.

A visitor, unfamiliar with your rules and stressed about a loved one's health, may fail to notice your humongous banner or the no-smoking symbol at your entryway, but likely has been to many places that ban smoking.

In any case, attaining visitor compliance is usually easy. Most smokers will immediately put out a cigarette when informed of the no-tobacco policy.<sup>xxiv</sup> Hospitals may encourage and expect all staff to inform visitors of the policy. Employees may appreciate a card or brochure that explains the hospital's rationale for its tobacco-free policy and provides information about quitting. Create such tools in multiple languages.

If policy information does not deter smoking, have employees take a non-confrontational approach, asking the visitor to please pick up the cigarette butt. Most hospitals also have a procedure in place in the rare case that a tobacco-use violation poses a potential safety threat to the property or to another person. Security staff generally intervenes in those circumstances.<sup>xliv</sup> These security personnel need to be trained to enforce the policy with a helpful, positive approach. This could include providing a visitor with the cards you developed, a map that shows where the visitor can smoke or, if necessary, escorting the visitor from the hospital grounds.

> *See [examples of visitor cards in Becoming & Remaining Tobacco-Free, Enforce Your Policy, Visitors, page 8.](#)*

### 3. Help visitors manage nicotine cravings and learn about quitting options.

One approach with visitors is to provide them with short-term symptom relief so they can spend more time visiting a hospitalized loved one. At the same time, don't miss a teachable moment. Many hospitals include information about quitting tobacco in materials about the hospital's tobacco-use policy.

Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) can be a tool for maintaining a tobacco-free policy. A visitor who uses NRT can most likely sustain a longer, more comfortable hospital visit than one who needs to leave the hospital to smoke. Find out whether over-the-counter NRT is available through the hospital gift shop or pharmacy or at a store in your neighborhood. Nicotine replacement lozenges or gum can provide more immediate relief than the longer-term patches.

Employees at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) give visitors who smoke a card that shows them where to find free NRT, while providing the tobacco quit line telephone number, 1-800 QUIT NOW. Trained staff distributes relief packets with two four-milligram nicotine replacement lozenges, repackaged for the hospital by the Louis, Ohio-based Shamrock Medical Solutions. The lozenge packets, approved by OHSU's legal counsel, include hospital disclaimers and FDA-required information about the medication.

A visitor may not be ready to quit, but having a loved one in the hospital can catalyze the quitting process. Include in your visitor communications information about the Tobacco Quit Line and other community resources so the visitor can find help when he or she is ready to quit.

Encouraging visitors to quit tobacco may offer health dividends for patients. Caregivers need to know that those with heart disease are at especially high risk of suffering adverse effects from breathing secondhand smoke and should avoid even brief exposures.<sup>iv</sup> Women who quit smoking during pregnancy are much more likely to resume smoking if their husbands, mothers or mothers-in-law smoke<sup>xliiv</sup>. Your tobacco-use intervention with a visitor could later protect a patient from second-hand smoke or support the patient in breaking the addiction to nicotine.

### 4. Provide tools to help staff enforce the policy.

Staff likely will appreciate cards or brochures they can give to a visitor or co-worker who is violating the policy. These usually include a message about the policy with information about how to quit, including the quit line phone number.

Asante Health System, in Southern Oregon, provides staff with a card, explaining how to respectfully ask visitors to comply with the tobacco-free policy.

The image shows two cards from Asante Health System. The left card is titled "Tobacco Free Asante Asking Visitors to Comply" and lists five points: S (Smile, introduce yourself, be friendly and personable), M (Make the assumption they do not know our policy), O (Offer resources for tobacco cessation), K (Keep reminding them of the link between tobacco use and healthcare), and E (Empathize. Depending on their emotional situation, we may not want to insist). The right card is titled "Tobacco Free Asante Facts and Resources" and lists statistics about tobacco use, followed by resources like the Oregon Tobacco Quit Line, American Cancer Society, American Lung Association, and Quit Net. Both cards feature the Asante logo and the slogan "Asante Health System a fresh start in a better place.".