

Abilene hospitals to become smoke-free

By APRIL NIXON
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Patients and employees of the major medical institutions in Abilene will no longer be able to smoke in hospital facilities as of May 1.

Representatives from Hendrick Medical Center, Humana Hospital-Abilene, Dyess Air Force Base Hospital and Woods Psychiatric Institute held a press conference Friday to announce that they would be "smoke free" in 1990.

"We have agreed to step forward together on this issue," said Michael Waters, president of Hendrick.

"It is the healthy thing to do, and we all feel strongly about it."

Tony Struthers, associate director of Humana, agreed.

"Smoking and the use of tobacco are incompatible with good health," he said.

"So Humana made the decision to work with our staff and patients to become smoke-free."

Hendrick will prohibit smoking in the hospital or on hospital property, except in their stress or chemical dependency units.

The other institutions will prohibit smoking in the buildings but will allow patients and employees to smoke on the grounds in designated areas.

Officials from Humana and Hendrick said patients will be able to smoke if a physician orders it.

The two hospitals and the psychiatric institute are following the lead of the Dyess hospital, which prohibited smoking in 1987.

"We applaud what these hospitals want to do," said Col. Dan Locker, commander of the base hospital.

But officials agree it won't be easy.

Waters said he expected some people to be unhappy with the new policy.

"There will be some backlash," he said. "But that is why we all came out on this issue together. To do anything else as medical facilities would be hypocritical."

Hendrick and Humana also will offer "stop smoking classes" in the community and among their employees.

"We are limiting the areas where people can smoke as of Jan. 1," said Randy Smith, Humana Hospital spokesman.

"But we're phasing this in. We're not saying they have to stop as of today."

But even though it may not be popular with everyone, a doctor at Hendrick applauded the hospitals' efforts.

"In spite of warnings, a large number of people remain unaware of the ill effects of smoking," said Jack Ramsey, a radiation oncologist.

Ramsey works in cancer treatment and said 150 people came to Hendrick last year with lung cancer.

"This will allow for a safer, more pleasant atmosphere," he said. "And it could influence youngsters who might think of taking this up."