

# MCV adds breathing space with smoking ban

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The 4,500 employees packed into Medical College of Virginia's 1,058-bed main hospital and seven surrounding buildings have gained some extra space.

## Breathing space.

That was the catch phrase on more than 1,000 blue balloons distributed throughout MCV Hospitals yesterday, the day the hospital's sweeping smoke-free policy went into effect.

Lighting up is outlawed in every area of the main hospital, as well as the West Hospital, the Massey Cancer Center, the Nelson Clinic and four other support buildings.

"This is a health-care institution," said Melinda Lee, who headed the nine-member task force that

drafted the smoke-free policy. "It's our duty to make this as healthy a place as possible. We're not doing this for any other reason."

MCV's policy is in keeping with a nationwide trend for hospitals — especially academic medical centers — to go smoke-free. MCV followed the example of the University of Virginia Medical Center and Duke University Medical Center, which implemented smoke-free policies within the past two years, Ms. Lee said.

MCV's policy includes two exceptions, she added.

Patients in the hospital's psychiatric unit are exempt from the policy, as are patients who have special permission from their doctors to smoke.

The smoke-free policy does not apply to the academic buildings of Virginia Commonwealth

University's health sciences division.

However, Ms. Lee said, no visitors and no staff members are allowed to smoke inside the hospital.

"We want to be compassionate," she said. "For a lot of people, this is very tough."

Shirley A. Warriner of Chester is an example of the people who have a hard time with the new policy. Mrs. Warriner, cigarette in hand, stood outside MCV's main entrance this morning and complained that "smokers have no rights."

She had come down from the seventh floor where her infant grandson was being treated for a congenital heart defect.

Mrs. Warriner, 55, herself is a frequent patient

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at MCV. She has had four heart procedures performed there during the past two years. A smoker since the age of 16, she may not be admitted to the hospital again.

"Before I come back here and not be able to smoke a cigarette, I'll lay at home and die," Mrs. Warriner said.

About two-thirds of the task force members, who have been meeting weekly since last September, are smokers or former smokers, Ms. Lee said.

Edith McLane, a nurse on the hospital's 10th floor, summed up the attitude of many employees who, like her, smoke: "We understand the policy, and we know it's best to stop. It's just hard to do."

Employees on the upper floors of the 11-story main hospital have even greater incentive to quit

smoking. Relying on the hospital elevators to get outside to smoke could mean a time-consuming round trip.

Sally Harbison, a nurse on MCV's top floor and a non-smoker, said everyone "seems to be coping well" so far and most of the staff members who smoke are trying to make it through the day without a cigarette.

A nurse from the 9th floor, who stood outside this morning, said she worries about craving a cigarette when she is the only registered nurse on duty. "I can't leave," she said.

Ms. Lee, an assistant to MCV Executive Director Carl R. Fischer, said hospital employees were informed of the smoke-free policy in January and have been offered "an array of stop-smoking classes."

"It's exciting. We've had many, many people quit (smoking)," she said.

Signs informing hospital visitors of the policy have been in place for a week and a half, Ms. Lee added.

One glitch in the implementation of the policy has been a delay in enhancing outside smoking areas, she said.

A beautification project that includes installing awnings and benches in several areas outside the hospital is not scheduled for completion until the end of June, Ms. Lee said.

Smoking policies have become "a sensitive issue" for hospitals, said Peggy J. Cooning, spokeswoman for the Virginia Hospital Association. "You're talking about patients and visitors who already are under a lot of stress."

However, she said, her association last year adopted a resolution urging all Virginia hospitals to implement smoke-free policies by January 1991.

At the time the resolution was approved, 12 of the Virginia Hospital Association's 118 member hospitals had such policies. Now, 38 hospitals have adopted smoke-free policies, and many others have policies that restrict smoking, Ms. Cooning added.

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