

Lights out at hospitals

Posted: Nov 18, 2009 6:38 PM EST Wednesday, November 18, 2009 6:38 PM EST Updated: Nov 18, 2009 6:39 PM EST

LEE COUNTY: Hospitals across southwest Florida are banning smoking completely. It's impacting more than just employees, like Adrienne Jones. She used to smoke a pack a day.

"Our lunch hour, smoke as many as you can instead of eating," admits Jones.

That attitude stopped a year ago when her 42-year old husband, also a smoker, suffered a heart attack.

"It was sudden," said Jones. "We didn't expect it, we didn't know he had a bad heart."

Health concerns are the main reason her employer, Lee Memorial Health System, is installing a tobacco ban on all their properties starting November 19.

To Barbara Whorley's disgust, the posted warning signs are already up.

"I've smoked since I was 12 years old," said Worley as she waited outside Lee Memorial. "That is my right. If I was to smoke myself to death - that is my right."

Worley has been coming here for the last six weeks to take care of her daughter-in-law. Yet, when she comes back Thursday, her familiar designated smoking area will be gone.

The tobacco ban is not just going into effect here - but at Lehigh Regional, Naples Community Hospital and at Physicians Regional.

Staff, patients, and visitors aren't even allowed to light up in their own vehicles. As long as you are on hospital property, tobacco products are banned.

"Tomorrow's a big day for us," said Scott Wiley.

Wiley is the director of cardiopulmonary services at Naples Community Hospital. He said employees at NCH have three tiers of health insurance available.

Those who chose to quit using tobacco products are eligible for a less expensive plan. Those that aren't ready to kick the habit must pay into the more expensive insurance tier.

"We want to focus on wellness and prevention verses just treating and paying for these medical costs down the road," explained Wiley.

Adrienne Jones took advantage of smoking cessation resources from Lee Memorial. Her husband has fully recovered from his heart attack, and she hasn't smoked a cigarette since February.

"I did it, I did it for him initially but then I did it for myself," said Jones.

Charlotte County hospitals already have this tobacco ban in place. It now applies to Lee and Collier Counties.

Southwest Florida hospitals chose to start the ban on November 19th to coincide with the 34th annual Great American Smoke Out – where smokers pledge to kick the habit for a certain number of hours.

Beginning Thursday, you'll be hard pressed to even to find ash trays on hospital properties.