

Penn latest hospital to not hire smokers

PHILADELPHIA, PA.; -Most hospitals have smoke-free campuses, meaning no one can smoke in or around the hospital.

But the University of Pennsylvania Health System has taken it a step further. Come July 1st, they won't hire anyone who smokes or uses tobacco.

The ban applies to the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Hospital, Penn-Presbyterian Medical Center, and any other Penn facilities in Pennsylvania.

The health system's centers in New Jersey are exempt, because it is against the law there to discriminate against smokers.

Workers who already use tobacco at Penn will not be affected, however, they already pay a bi-weekly surcharge on their health insurance.

Penn says the effort will improve the health of its workforce and save, on average, 34-hundred dollars in health care costs, per worker.

The smokers-need-not-apply movement began with the Cleveland Clinic. After 2 years as a smoke-free campus, in 2007, the health system decided not to hire tobacco users, and subject job candidates to a nicotine urine test.

Within a few years of the ban, smoking rates in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, had gone down.

Geisinger Health System, which serves the central and northern sections of Pennsylvania, stopped hiring smokers at the beginning of 2012.

In our area, Abington Memorial stopped hiring smokers as of July 1, 2011. St. Luke's Health Network, which has facilities in Bucks, Lehigh and Northampton counties, stopped in 2010. Roxborough Memorial Hospital in Philadelphia, stopped hiring smokers as of September 1, 2012.

Michael Henrici, the head of human resources at Roxborough, says the new policy was a "non-event," with no complaints from workers. Henrici adds that only one candidate has tested positive.

He says there were a few complaints when the hospital instituted a smokers surcharge on health insurance premiums. But those faded quickly.

As of January 1, 2013, Lancaster General also said no to those who smoke, dip, or chew, following the lead of Ephrata Community hospital. The ban applies to its hospitals, outpatient offices, and its Visiting Nurses Association community services.