

**For Immediate Release
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STEGH Announces Plans for Smoke Free Environment Effective May 31, 2010

St. Thomas, ON – The St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital (STEGH) will join many other healthcare facilities across Ontario and become smoke free. The implementation date will be May 31, 2010, aligning with the World Health Organization's "World No Tobacco Day". Smoking will not be permitted anywhere on hospital property including parking lots and formerly designated smoking areas.

Implementing a smoke free environment is an ongoing demonstration of STEGH's commitment to providing a safe and healthy environment. The new smoke free environment policy is intended to promote the health and well-being of the community, eliminate exposure to second-hand smoke on hospital property, and is in support the Stop Smoking for Safer Surgery Campaign, sponsored by the Anaesthesia section of the OMA.

"Our Board of Governors supports the new smoke free facility policy, which sends a clear message to our community that disease prevention is as important as the treatment of illness, and that our Hospital is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for both our patients and staff," explains STEGH Board Chair Lyle McLean.

Anyone wishing to smoke will be required to leave Hospital property. The property line is defined as city maintained sidewalks or beyond the tree line should there be no sidewalk. Patients requiring assistance to leave the property to smoke will require a family member to assist them.

"We realize for smokers, this change may present some challenges," says Paul Collins, STEGH President and CEO. "Supports will be available to patients during their hospital stay. We have also put in place smoking-cessation supports for staff as we transition to a smoke-free environment."

Dr. Nancy Whitmore, STEGH Chief of Staff explains that, "Supports will be in place for patients who are smokers and this will include access to smoking cessation programs and the availability of nicotine replacement products as required."

STEGH is launching an internal and external awareness campaign that begins this month and will continue throughout 2010. During this time, STEGH will undertake various initiatives.

Initiatives will include:

- Partnership with Elgin St. Thomas Public Health to provide support and counseling,
- Information and links to helpful information on STEGH's intranet and external website
- Information provided to patients during appointment booking, pre-admit process and admission to hospital, and in hospital waiting rooms and public areas.
- Support for staff , physicians and volunteers who smoke includes smoking cessation information kits available in the Occupational Health, Safety and Wellness office
- Access to smoking cessation programs and the availability of nicotine replacement products as required, for patients who smoke
- Staff learning modules and education sessions to review how best to support smokers both through medication and counseling to help alleviate nicotine withdrawal symptoms while they are in hospital care.
- Internal and external signage

For more information contact:

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Other hospitals in Ontario to become smoke free include: Chatham Kent Health Alliance, Cambridge Memorial, Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, Woodstock General Hospital, Joseph Brant, The Ottawa Hospital, Trillium Hospital, Credit Valley Hospital, York Central Hospital, Halton Healthcare Services, and Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance.