



## **POLICY STATEMENT 1**

# **SMOKING BY MENTAL HEALTH PATIENTS WITHIN PRIVATE HOSPITAL SETTINGS**

### **Background**

People with mental health conditions often have a higher ratio of cigarette smokers, and tend to smoke more heavily than the general population. People with severe mental illness are likely to be more inclined to smoke heavily than those with milder mental health problems.

Nicotine addiction is caused by cigarette smoking and nicotine withdrawal is difficult for most people. For those with mental health issues, quitting smoking is a complex and difficult process rather than a single event.

Smoking in a hospital environment is an issue for all non smoking patients, staff and visitors. There are though particular issues for mental health patients who *do* smoke that need to be considered separately as part of any broader measures.

Complicating the matter further, are the legislative differences between jurisdictions on the restrictions applicable to smoking, including within hospitals environs. There are significant and growing difficulties for private hospitals in managing the health and legislative considerations raised by smoking in a hospital setting. In addition, although smoking is legal, there are associated problems created by allowing smoking in a hospital environment.

### **Policy**

The Network believes that to require a mental health patient (who is most likely already in a sufficiently vulnerable state to require hospitalisation) to cease smoking during their stay could cause extreme distress and possibly impede recovery. The provision of nicotine patches alone would be insufficient to address all aspects of smoking withdrawal.

The Network does acknowledge, however, that a number of strategies should be considered for implementation to ensure the minimising of the adverse factors of smoking in a hospital environment. The Network recommends:

1. That nicotine patches are routinely offered to all patients who smoke.
2. That there is a dedicated smoking area for patients, one that is functional yet discourages lengthy personal interactions or individual isolation.
3. That hospitals establish dedicated program/s for mental health patients to promote withdrawal, assist abstinence and encourage alternatives within the context of the management of their mental illness.

Smokers should not cause inconvenience or stress to other patients.

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Policy to be reviewed: February 2015***