



For Immediate Release: February 13th, 2013

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Grand Itasca Clinic and Hospital to Phase out Sugary Beverages

“Northeast Minnesota Hospitals Create Prevention Model for Minnesota Hospitals and Communities by Eliminating Sugary Beverages”

(Duluth) Grand Itasca announced today the phase-out of Sugary Beverage Sales and distribution to patients. This important announcement is consistent with a national trend in healthcare institutions which includes the Cleveland Clinic, Packard Children’s Hospital, Chicago based Vanguard System, Baylor Health and more. It is the second hospital in Minnesota, after Duluth based St. Luke’s, to adopt a sugary beverage phase-out policy.

Beginning on March 2, 2013, all sugar-sweetened beverages will be removed from the beverage choices available in the cafeteria, coffee bar and vending areas. This move makes Grand Itasca one of only two health care facilities in the state who will not offer sugar-sweetened beverages. It also supports Grand Itasca’s focus on the community’s health and wellbeing as a participating organization in the Healthy Communities Partnership program, a three-year wellness initiative funded by Allina Health and the George Family Foundation focused on transforming the health of 13 communities in Minnesota.

“By phasing our sugary beverages Grand Itasca demonstrates statewide leadership on community driven healthcare”, stated Jamie Harvie, Executive Director of the Institute for a Sustainable Future host

organization for the Commons Health Hospital Challenge (www.commonshhealthchallenge.org).

“Northeast Minnesota hospitals are setting an important example for the healthcare community in Minnesota. This Hospital leadership on sugary beverage phase-outs is important, because it provides an example for workplaces and communities”, he added.

“The evidence that sugar-sweetened beverages are hazardous to our health is overwhelming, and it shows that they contribute not only to obesity and diabetes, but to an increased risk for heart disease as well,” says Dr. Lisa Owens, general surgeon at Grand Itasca. “While we acknowledge that consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is only one of many factors contributing to obesity, reducing consumption is a fairly easy way to begin reversing the trend. As a health care leader in our community, we feel obligated to make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

In a statement of support for the Hospital Challenge the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics states, “We believe it is easier for providers to encourage better nutrition when these choices are being modeled by the local clinics and hospitals in which we serve”.

“Because sugar-sweetened beverages are a significant source of empty calories and have little to no nutritional value, it makes sense to eliminate the distribution of these beverages within our facility,” said Valarie Plackner, registered dietitian at Grand Itasca.

Grand Itasca defines sugar-sweetened beverages as those to which sugars, such as high fructose corn syrup or sucrose, have been added. They include regular soft drinks, fruit drinks that are not 100% juice, sports drinks, tea and coffee drinks, and energy drinks. Grand Itasca will continue to serve and sell water, low-fat or non-fat milk, unsweetened coffee and teas, 100% fruit and vegetable juices, and diet soft drinks. Additionally, some sugar-sweetened beverages will be available for patients as directed by their health care provider.

Sugar sweetened beverages, few of which have any nutritional value, account for half of all added sugars in the average American diet. Studies overwhelmingly show that consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) leads to weight gain and obesity which in turn promote diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and many other health problems. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, American Heart Association and others have called for a sharp reduction and/or limits in the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages, the largest contributing dietary source of added sugar.

The Commons Health Hospital Challenge is endorsed by the American Heart Association, the Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians, the Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Minnesota Cancer Alliance and more. A variety of tools and resources for hospitals and communities interested in sugary beverage elimination are available on the Commons Health Hospital Challenge website www.commonshhealthchallenge.org

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