



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Sacred Heart Health System Taking Steps to Combat Antibiotic Misuse

PENSACOLA, Fla. – According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 30 percent of the antibiotics prescribed by doctors' offices and emergency departments are unnecessary. To help curb the misuse of antibiotics, Sacred Heart Health System is initiating a new program that will educate patients and reduce the risk of infections that are resistant to antibiotics.

Sacred Heart Health System is a member of Ascension, the largest non-profit health system in the U.S. and the world's largest Catholic health system.

Dr. Doug Ross, chief clinical officer of Sacred Heart Health System said changing the antibiotic prescription habits of patients and doctors requires a complete mindset and culture change.

"Unfortunately, patients have become accustomed to receiving antibiotics when they don't feel well," he said. "Doctors want the best for their patients, and sometimes they prescribe antibiotics before receiving test results that identify the actual cause of infection."

Ross said Sacred Heart Health System is initiating an antibiotic stewardship program because interventions have proven to improve patient outcomes, reduce the proliferation of antibiotic resistance, and save lives.

Dr. Issa Ephtimios, an epidemiologist at Sacred Heart Hospital Pensacola and chair of the infection control committee, said the key factors contributing to antibiotic-resistant infections are the overuse and misuse of antibiotics.

"Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can infect anyone, anytime and anywhere," Ephtimios said. "When you overuse or misuse antibiotics it creates a domino effect where you place yourself and others at risk. Research has shown that communities with higher levels of outpatient antibiotic use have higher rates of resistance to these medications."

Antibiotic resistance has become a global epidemic. According to the CDC, two million people become infected with bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics in the U.S. each year, and at least 23,000 people die as a direct result of these infections. The inappropriate use of antibiotics has also given rise to a severe intestinal bacterium, called *Clostridium difficile* or *C. diff* that is resistant to antibiotics. *C. diff* causes prolonged hospital stays, and up to 30,000 deaths each year.

Sacred Heart Health System is supported in its efforts on a national level by the Ascension Center of Excellence (COE) for Antimicrobial Stewardship and Infection Prevention. "Ascension has been working to build antibiotic stewardship programs across our health system," said Mohamad Fakihi, MD, MPH, Senior Medical Director of the Ascension Center of Excellence. "The goal is to optimize the use of antibiotics so that patients receive the most appropriate and effective treatment for the infection they actually have."

The new program will provide all Sacred Heart Medical Group doctors' offices with educational materials that inform patients on symptoms associated with viral versus bacterial infections and steps they can take to alleviate their symptoms.

While antibiotics are effective in treating bacterial infections, they don't work against viral infections like the common cold, most sore throats and the flu, Ephtimios added.

"With cold and flu season on the horizon, patients will need to understand that if they don't receive an antibiotic prescription from their doctor, it's because their symptoms don't warrant it," Ephtimios said. "Our goal is to keep everyone – patients and the community – safe year-round."

For more information on how to distinguish a viral infection from a bacterial one, go to www.xxxx.xxx.org.

About Sacred Heart Hospital

Sacred Heart Hospital in Pensacola (SHHP) is a 566-bed acute care hospital that has been rated by area consumers as the most preferred hospital in the Pensacola area and the best for quality and reputation. For more than 100 years, its mission has been to provide high-quality compassionate healthcare to all persons in need, with special attention to those who are poor or vulnerable. SHHP serves as a regional medical center with expertise in providing specialized care for treatment of heart disease, cancer, stroke, bone and joint diseases, and traumatic illnesses and injuries, as well as care to women with high-risk pregnancies. More women choose to have their babies at Sacred Heart than any other hospital in Northwest Florida. Sacred Heart's Pensacola campus also is home to The Studer Family Children's Hospital at Sacred Heart, the region's only hospital dedicated to care of infants and children with acute injuries or illnesses. The Pensacola facilities are the hub of Sacred Heart Health System and its network of hospitals, outpatient medical parks, long-term care facility and a large group of 150 primary care physicians and specialists. Sacred Heart Hospital was founded by the Daughters of Charity in 1915 in a beautiful building that still stands on 12th Avenue in Pensacola. In 1965, the hospital was relocated to its present site on 9th Avenue. Sacred Heart Health System is a member of Ascension, the largest non-profit health system in the U.S. and the world's largest Catholic health system. For more information, visit www.sacred-heart.org.

About Ascension

Ascension (www.ascension.org) is a faith-based healthcare organization dedicated to transformation through innovation across the continuum of care. As the largest non-profit health system in the U.S. and the world's largest Catholic health system, Ascension is committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. In FY2015, Ascension provided nearly \$2 billion in care of persons living in poverty and other community benefit programs. Approximately 160,000 associates and 36,000 aligned providers serve in 2,500 sites of care – including 141 hospitals and more than 30 senior living facilities – in 24 states and the District of Columbia. In addition to healthcare delivery, Ascension subsidiaries provide a variety of services and solutions including physician practice management, venture capital investing, investment management, biomedical engineering, clinical care management, information services, risk management, and contracting through Ascension's own group purchasing organization.

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