

For: Immediate Release Contact: Rob Cavanaugh

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**JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute:**

**Helping Kids Kick The Habit**

Edison, NJ—From April 10 to the 14<sup>th</sup>, staff from the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology of JFK/Johnson Rehabilitation Institute (JRI) will be at Woodbridge Middle Schools to talk to 6<sup>th</sup> graders about the habit and hazards of cigarette smoking. It is a message that these children need to hear beginning at a very young age.

”Children as young as sixth grade are feeling the pressure to smoke. We have to reach them before it’s too late,” says Kristie Soriano, Clinical Director of Speech at JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute (JRI).

Every day, speech pathologists like those at JRI see the horrible effects of smoking. Patients who suffer laryngeal cancer, for example, can lose their larynx and be forced to rely on artificial methods to create vocal sound. Every 72 seconds, someone dies of lung or throat cancer. These cancers are often tobacco related and are very real examples of the devastating effects of the habit awaiting smokers young and old. “The tragedy,” says Soriano, “is that these consequences are preventable.”

Every day, nearly 4000 kids under 18 try smoking for the first time and more than 2000 of them will become regular, daily smokers. “Smoking can seem like an innocuous habit at first. It is only after time that the damage can be seen,” says Soriano. Smoking is one of those habits that through its addictive qualities reinforces itself, creating a lifelong stronghold on its victim and the increased likelihood of health consequences. It’s not an easy habit to kick, but it can be done.” Smoking is an easier habit to prevent rather than stop, so Soriano and her team feel the urgency to get the message to children when it can have the most impact. “If you can reach them while they’re young with the message of what this habit will do to them, you can prevent the devastating and very real health consequences.”

JRI has a school-based initiative where they educate young students on the dangers of smoking, presenting anti-smoking advocates who have undergone a laryngectomy (the removal of the larynx or “voicebox”). “If children can see the result of such a habit, they are often going to be less inclined to begin such a habit in the first

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**Helping Kids Kick The Habit, add one**

place,” says Soriano.

During the first day of the student assembly program, students were asked what they would now do if a friend approached them with a cigarette and wanted them to try it. The kids responded:

- "No, I tried it once and I don't want to lose my voicebox. I'd just walk away."
- "No I don't want to have lung cancer."
- "No because I saw the effects that it has and that would be too hard for me without a voicebox."
- "No I don't follow the crowd. Smoking is not cool."

For more information on anti-smoking outreach programs, contact JRI’s Speech and Audiology department at 732-321-7063.

Founded in 1974, The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute is a major component of Solaris Health System, one of New Jersey’s most comprehensive healthcare networks.

The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute headquartered at the JFK Medical Center in Edison is a comprehensive rehabilitative service provider focused on restoring and returning disabled adults and children to optimal function and independence within the community. The Institute offers a complete array of inpatient and outpatient programs and services in rehabilitative health, including stroke, orthopedics, fitness, cardiac, women's health, pediatrics, and brain injury rehabilitation programs and services. JRI includes a 94-bed inpatient center in Edison. Outpatient centers are located in Edison, Metuchen, Monroe, Old Bridge, and Plainfield. Affiliated with the JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute is the Shore Rehabilitation Institute, a 40-bed inpatient and outpatient comprehensive rehabilitation hospital located in Brick, NJ. The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) for its Comprehensive Inpatient Rehabilitation, Brain Injury, and Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation programs. For more information on The JFK Johnson Rehabilitation Institute, call 732-321-7790 or visit the organization online at <http://www.njrehab.org>.

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