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Inglis, Romberger lead forum tackling chronic disease

SC group hopes to increase awareness

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A discussion on the impact chronic diseases have on health care began by acknowledging its complexity. It ended on the same note, but in between, a ideas were shared and awareness was raised.

The S.C. Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease hosted its first forum on health care and the impact chronic disease has on the population and economy. The Columbia-based nonprofit plans to have to hold forums in all congressional districts.

"If you get enough backyard discussions going on, you're going to have a real national movement," said Anthony Quattrone, director of the Partnership.

Thirty-nine percent of South Carolinians have a chronic disease, which includes high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and high cholesterol.

U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis; Tim Ervolina, president of the United Way Association of South Carolina; and Renee Romberger, vice president of community health policy and strategy for Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System participated in a panel discussion during the event.

Romberger said the number of people with chronic diseases could increase because of rising numbers of obese children. She said 64 percent of Spartanburg's population is overweight. Twenty-five percent of the county smokes, compared with 22 percent of the state's population.

Inglis said the most obvious way to decrease chronic diseases is to change behavior, but he admitted that's hard without coming across too righteous. Plus, some doctors don't eat right.

"We all know we need to eat better, exercise, sleep and drink plenty of water, but

we don't do it," Inglis said.

All three agreed that changes to public policy could help lower the number of people with chronic diseases. The state's cigarette tax was used as an example. South Carolina levies seven cents on a pack of cigarettes and the national average is \$1.07.

"As long as cigarettes are a bargain, kids are going to buy them, get addicted, and you're going to pay for it," Ervolina said.

Romberger said use of electronic medical records could help prevent chronic disease. SRHS uses the technology and can quickly access, for instance, the number of people age 50 and older who haven't had a colonoscopy, and the hospital can contact those patients. She said SRHS has done that, and 9 percent of people receiving a letter scheduled a colonoscopy.

Last year, Inglis spent nine months doing a 75-stop health care tour around the Fourth Congressional District. He said health care is a more complicated issue than energy or immigration.

He said those without insurance have shifted costs to those with insurance, and people sometimes don't feel the responsibility of their health care decisions or feel the incentive to take preventive steps.

Inglis said health care coverage is needed for everyone, but the difficult issue is deciding who should be responsible for providing it. He likes the idea of health savings accounts that people would be responsible for managing to cover health care costs and possibly requiring annual physicals.

Romberger said clinics serving Spartanburg's uninsured are full, and people without insurance usually don't schedule doctor's appointments and don't have a medical home.
