

Greenville News Editorial: A new approach to health care

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With the nation's attention now focused on health care, it's more appropriate than ever that Bon Secours St. Francis Health System has launched a new treatment program being billed as changing "sick care to health care." It's also encouraging that one of the county's largest employers will work with St. Francis in a pilot project that, as both partners have said, could help transform health care.

St. Francis last week unveiled its Institute for Chronic Health on the hospital system's new Millennium campus. Michelin North America, which consistently shows its commitment to enhancing the quality of life in this area, will participate in a program to treat chronic conditions. The pilot project will involve Michelin employees who have diabetes.

"What if hospitals and doctors stopped seeing the primary goal as just treating illness and disease," St. Francis CEO Valinda Rutledge was quoted as saying, "but looked at how to fundamentally rearrange every element in a patient's care to create innovative plans for chronic diseases at the early stage and prevent limb amputation or blindness from occurring."

For years Americans have been treated to ever-increasing costs for health insurance and, in many cases, higher deductibles and in some cases reduced treatment options. At the same time, employers have seen their health-care costs skyrocket and most are desperate to reduce expenses while also providing high-quality health care for their employees.

As Rutledge and Dick Wilkerson, chairman and president of Michelin North America, wrote in an op-ed recently published here, this new approach aims to keep patients at the center of any discussion about health care while ensuring their health and treatment are the priority. Doing so requires a profound change that, as they wrote, will align employers and health providers with shared incentives that will result in healthy, productive employees.

So how can this work? Take diabetes, a chronic illness that can produce other health problems such as blindness or limb amputation, and a disease that requires daily management. Patients referred to the Institute of Chronic Health will work with specialists — including specially trained nurses, exercise physiologists, dietitians and therapists — to develop an individualized fitness program and lifestyle plan. -- end --