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VA may enlist aid of local medical providers

Inglis also visits Mitsubishi as he explores health-care innovations in 4th District

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GREER -- U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis brought together regional Veterans Affairs officials with local health-care providers Monday to explore contracting out specialty services.

He also visited Mitsubishi Polyester Film, where he praised its "consumer-driven" health-care program.

At Mitsubishi, wellness is emphasized so much that employees pay less for health coverage if they don't smoke. However, if they take advantage of that lower premium and test positive during random nicotine testing, the penalty can be termination, according to Annmarie Higgins, human resources officer.

Those who return to smoking and are honest about it aren't risking their jobs, but they pay the higher premium, according to Higgins.

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The plan, which Mitsubishi says has brought its health-care costs down, includes preventive care, an on-site doctor's office for employees and families, a disease management program and personal health coaching.

Inglis is on a fact-finding health-care tour across the 4th District through May searching for innovative programs.

He learned during a meeting at the Greer Development Corp. that the VA expects a 96 percent growth in medical specialty visits by 2015 over 2005.

The need is growing because soldiers are returning from Iraq, veterans are aging and this area is experiencing move-ins from the North and Florida, said Priscilla

Creamer, spokeswoman for Dorn VA Medical Center in Columbia.

Inglis was interested in learning how veterans could be served closer to home than having to drive to Columbia or Asheville for specialty services such as cardiology tests.

The VA requires veterans to be treated within 30 days, and numbers rather than proximity to care would drive the need for contracting with private doctors or hospitals, according to Biro.

The VA has a clinic in Greenville and is opening one in Spartanburg, but they're not geared for specialty

testing.
