

Spartanburg College Students Work to Eliminate Toll of Tobacco Use

Issue

As the Director of Health Services at Spartanburg Methodist College, Carol Shearin would be the obvious person to lead her campus in a smoke free campaign. However, Carol had serious doubts about her effectiveness in this role because she has been a smoker for more than 30 years. But, Carol may be just what her students need as they are looking forward to quitting along with her.

College students in the 18-24 year old population are in a high-priority risk group for tobacco control. It is proven that long-term addiction starts within this age group. In South Carolina, 37.5% of 18-24 year olds have smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetimes. The majority of college students who smoke want to quit before they graduate, but 70.4% of 18-24 year olds in South Carolina have been unsuccessful in their attempt to quit smoking during the past year. Tobacco use places a steep economic burden on the state with annual healthcare costs topping \$1.09 billion. Smoking creates another \$1.83 billion in productivity losses each year in the Palmetto State.

Intervention

The Spartanburg Coalition for Tobacco-Free Living in partnership with the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's PHS Block grant staff and local colleges received a \$10,000 grant from the American Cancer Society to implement the Spartanburg Colleges Taskforce on Tobacco. The taskforce's mission will be to reduce tobacco-related health risk among students, administrators, teachers and visitors at all six colleges in Spartanburg County, by eliminating exposure to secondhand smoke. Adopting smoke-free policies is the only way to protect against exposure to secondhand smoke, according to the recent Surgeon General's report. Although other schools in South Carolina are working individually on improving their tobacco policies to ultimately go smoke-free, this is the first initiative in the state that brings several colleges together to work collectively on tobacco control. During 2006, the Taskforce Planning Committee has accomplished the following:

- The Tobacco Coalition and all six colleges worked together to determine need and interest for the American Cancer Society grant;
- Two representatives from local colleges attended the 5th National Tobacco Symposium on Young Adults;
- Mini grant applications were sent to all six colleges in Spartanburg County with the opportunity to apply for \$1,000.

Impact

Carol Shaerin is taking the lead in Spartanburg Methodist College's smoke free campaign and plans to enroll alongside her students in the Freshstart smoking cessation program. Four other Spartanburg County colleges are also making plans to implement environmental and policy changes on campus. Spartanburg has the highest per capita college population of any large city in South Carolina. There is a potential to impact more than 10,000 students with this initiative. Each college has:

- Developed a tobacco committee on campus with representation from students, faculty, and staff;
- Received a \$1,000 mini-grant to provide educational materials, smoking cessation programs, and implement policy and environmental changes on campus;
- Attended the first meeting of the Spartanburg Colleges Taskforce on Tobacco.

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