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County approves initiative

■ The Dougherty County Commission approves a change to an employee health plan.

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ALBANY — The Dougherty County Commission approved an initiative Monday aimed at lowering health care costs by identifying employees at risk of heart problems.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention designed the Cardiovascular Health Initiative to "catch (people at cardiac risk) early and get them in an intervention pro-

gram that helps change life styles," said Kirk Rouse, a consultant for the group health care plan for Dougherty County, the city of Albany and Water, Gas & Light. Rouse presented the initiative to county commissioners at their Monday work session.

The three organizations jointly fund the plan. WG&L approved the initiative Thursday. The Albany City Commission is to consider approving the initiative at a called meeting today.

Employees who enroll in the group plan will have two options: they can screen for heart trouble, or they can choose not to.

The health screen will include a blood pressure check, a weight check

and a blood profile, Rouse said.

If a screening shows an employee is at risk, he will be required to complete an 8-week "risk-reduction program" led by physicians, dietitians and other medical personnel, Rouse said. The employee will attend a one-hour session each week during work hours.

Rouse said the programs have proven effective in lowering employees' risk for heart trouble and, as a result, reduced organizations' health care costs.

If an employee declines the screening, he will have to pay a \$1,500 deductible, instead of a \$300 deductible, what County Administrator Richard Crowdis called "plan B."

"We would hope all of them would

go through (the screening)," Crowdis said. "But if not, they get a much higher deductible because they won't be managing the risk."

Commissioner Chuck Lingle said employees who are already seeking treatment for chronic conditions shouldn't be required to accept the screening to avoid the higher deductible. Deborah Phillips, another of the plan's consultants, assured commissioners the initiative is malleable.

Rouse said the initiative will require about \$360,000 from the health care budget. He said about 2,200 county, city and WG&L employees enrolled in the group plan this past year.

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