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## Pate speaks on health care reform, St. Luke's future

The medical system is broken and St. Luke's is trying to figure out some fix. That was much of the message of Dr. David Pate, president and CEO of St. Luke's Health System, as he addressed an audience of about 80 people at a Herrett Forum lecture Wednesday night at the Herrett Center for Arts and Science.

The audience came to hear a talk titled "Health Care Reform has passed. Now what?" But while Pate talked about health care reform, he said much of it is still too vague to address. Instead, he spent a fair amount of time talking up St. Luke's plan for its hospitals, particularly the new Twin Falls hospital. "I don't have all the answers," Pate said. "We don't know where it's all going."

Pate was willing to gamble on a few predictions, including that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act won't be repealed. But he predicted the Supreme Court will rule it unconstitutional by a vote of 5-4. It will take a couple of years before the ruling comes down, he said, and by then, many things will already be in place.

"The ironic thing is, had they called it a 'tax,' it would have been constitutional," said Pate, who also attended law school.

Pate focused on the fact that the penalty for not buying insurance will be less than the cost of premiums. So, Pate said, there is little incentive for smaller retail businesses to provide insurance for employees because it costs less to pay the penalty.

"So we'll still have the same problem of the uninsured waiting until they're critical and then using the emergency room for free," he said. "Last year, St. Luke's didn't get paid for \$321 million worth of care. That drives up cost."

During a question-and-answer session, Kat Sprong asked Pate what good a new hospital is when the only way she can afford insurance is to have a high deductible.

"I don't make enough money to pay the deductible so I can't afford to use your hospital," Sprong said. "For-profit insurance is a big part of the problem."

Pate didn't have an answer other than to say the insurance system is broken, much like the medical system, but he is working on a way to make the latter better.

Susan Medford was one of many who came because of the lecture's advertised emphasis on health care reform. She works in human resources and said she wanted to hear about reform from a different point of view — that of a medical provider.

"It was beneficial," Medford said.

*St Lukes 1*

Outside the lecture room, Sprong, Sherry Hennessey and Steve Tanguy conducted a post-lecture wrap-up.

“This isn’t going to do any good; the whole system is just broken,” Hennessey said.

Tanguy said he learned first-hand in January how different hospitals can be. He watched both his father in Woodland Hills, Calif., and his father-in-law in Longview, Wash., die within weeks of each other. Tanguy said the smaller Longview hospital provided far better care, so he wasn’t impressed by a new, larger hospital and streamlined plans in Twin Falls.

“I liked some of what Pate said but they’re building new facilities,” Tanguy said. “If they’re hurting so bad, why are they doing that?”