

Good Morning, Buffalo

A quick look at what's happening today

By News Staff

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David Blumenthal, national coordinator for health information technology in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, comes to Cheektowaga today to tour the operations of HEALTHeLINK, the Western New York Clinical Information Exchange, which helps medical professionals share information about patients with diabetes. The company is due to get \$16.1 million in federal funding and Blumenthal will talk about what that will pay for.

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Using technology to fight diabetes in WNY

By **Brian Meyer**
News Staff Reporter

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With Dr. David Blumenthal, national coordinator for health information technology, at left, Daniel Porreca, executive director HEALTHeLINK, speaks about the \$16.1 million grant. Bill Wippert / Buffalo News

Medical experts are harnessing health information technology to try to fight the high rate of diabetes in Western New York.

The nation's point man for a project that aims to tap technology to improve care and cut costs was in Buffalo today. He announced that a local coalition has received a \$16.1 million federal grant -- the largest grant of its kind -- to help promote the use electronic health records and other cutting-edge information technology.

HEALTHeLink is a partnership between some of the region's largest health care providers and insurers. The group competed with more than 130 applicants nationwide and snared one of only 15 grants awarded by the federally-funded Beacon Project.

Western New York has an opportunity to play a "transformational" role in reshaping how the medical community tracks patient care, said David Blumenthal, national coordinator for the federal government's health information technology information.

Blumenthal spent 30 years as a primary care physician. In an interview with The Buffalo News, he explained how the use of health information technology can improve the coordination of care, provide better prevent methods and eliminate inefficiencies. Through the exchange of information via electronic health records, he said medical experts can avoid everything from administering duplicative tests, to making sure that prescriptions are compatible with treatments that are given.

"That coordination is absolutely vital to the control of a chronic condition like diabetes."

Electronic health records can even provide simple -- albeit time-saving information such as telling physicians which radiology facility has a patient's X-rays, said Dr. Michael Cropp, president and CEO of Independent Health Association.

The grant was announced at a news conference at HEALTHeLINK's offices on Walden Avenue in Cheektowaga. Strategies for improving health care will be developed -- not in Washington -- but in communities like Western New York, said Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo.

Doctors who convert to electronic records systems receive government incentives in the form of higher Medicaid or Medicare reimbursements.

As part of the grant, medical experts will be required to meet certain outcomes. For example, they will have to show reductions in emergency room visits and in hospital readmission rates for diabetic patients. Another goal will involve increasing flu vaccination rates among diabetic patients.

State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines also attended the news conference.



HEALTHeLINK Unveils \$16.1 Million Beacon Community Initiative to Fight Diabetes

Tuesday, August 24th, 1:04pm



Dr. David Blumenthal, the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, Kaleida Health CEO James Kaskie, Congressman Higgins, HEALTHeLINK Board President and Independent Health CEO Dr. Michael Cropp and NYS Health Commissioner Richard Daines discuss a project in WNY to fully integrate health IT into care and treatment of patients with diabetes

BUFFALO, N.Y. – In June 2010, HEALTHeLINK received the largest Beacon Community Award in the United States from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Beacon Project was created to help communities use health information technology to forge cooperation and use resources effectively toward local priority health goals.

HEALTHeLINK was joined today by Dr. David Blumenthal, the point person for the national health information technology initiative, as well as other dignitaries, including Congressman Brian Higgins and New York State Health Commissioner Dr. Richard F. Daines, to unveil details about HEALTHeLINK’s \$16.1 million plan to fight the high incidences of diabetes in the Western New York Community through health information technology.

“I would like to congratulate Buffalo and the Western New York community for collaborating to strengthen a clinical information exchange and related care coordination program that exemplifies our aspirations for creating a national health information technology infrastructure aimed at realizing specific health care quality and efficiency goals,” said David Blumenthal, M.D., M.P.P., National Coordinator for Health Information Technology under the auspices of HHS.

“This project is one of several local initiatives that demonstrate how Western New York is leading the way in health innovation,” said Congressman Brian Higgins. “We thank Dr. Blumenthal for his interest in this region’s efforts to become an early adaptor and we credit local health care leaders who are collaborating through HEALTHeLINK to advance affordable, quality health care delivery in our community and beyond.”

“The HEALTHeLINK program is the wave of the future for treating chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, promising enhanced coordinated care for patients in Western New York through the use of health information technology,” said New York State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D. “I applaud the dedication and collaboration of HEALTHeLINK’s community partners to launch this important initiative that will help achieve better health outcomes for patients and serve as a national model for advancing health IT.”

HEALTHeLINK must fulfill various outcomes as required in the Beacon award, including demonstrating cost savings as measured by a 5 percent reduction in visits to the emergency room, a 5 percent reduction in hospitalizations for ambulatory care and a 5 percent reduction in 30 day readmission rates for diabetic patients. Another outcome is to increase pneumococcal vaccinations and annual seasonal influenza vaccination rates by 10 percent using electronic health record alerts and prompts for individuals with diabetes.

“The growing incidence of diabetes in Western New York and across the country is staggering and the Beacon Community Award will help in battling this debilitating disease with improved care coordination and new resources available through the HEALTHeLINK network,” said Michael W. Cropp, M.D., president and CEO, Independent Health and HEALTHeLINK chairman. “Our unprecedented level of collaboration between physicians, health plans and hospitals to improve the quality of health care in our community was a critical factor in receiving this grant. Sustainable solutions to fixing health care locally and nationally require a collective responsibility. We’re proud to be recognized by the Obama administration for our efforts and encourage all area physicians to join the HEALTHeLINK network to help continue improving the quality of health care for all Western New Yorkers.”

“The Beacon Community Program award to HEALTHeLINK is recognition of the promise of technology to enhance health care for those living with diabetes,” said Peter Knappen, director, American Diabetes Association, Western New York. “We are extremely excited to be part of this initiative for our community.”

About the Beacon Community Program

The \$235 million Beacon Community Program was created last year under the Health Information Technology Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, enacted last year by Congress and President Obama, as part of a battery of new activities to support the nation’s transition from paper-based medical records to electronic health records (EHR). A total of 17 selected Beacon communities will pioneer to use of health information technology tools to focus community-wide efforts on specific health targets that are most important for each community. Beacon communities will also provide learning and lessons for other communities as they adopt and employ health information technology. For more information please visit <http://healthit.hhs.gov>.

About HEALTHeLINK

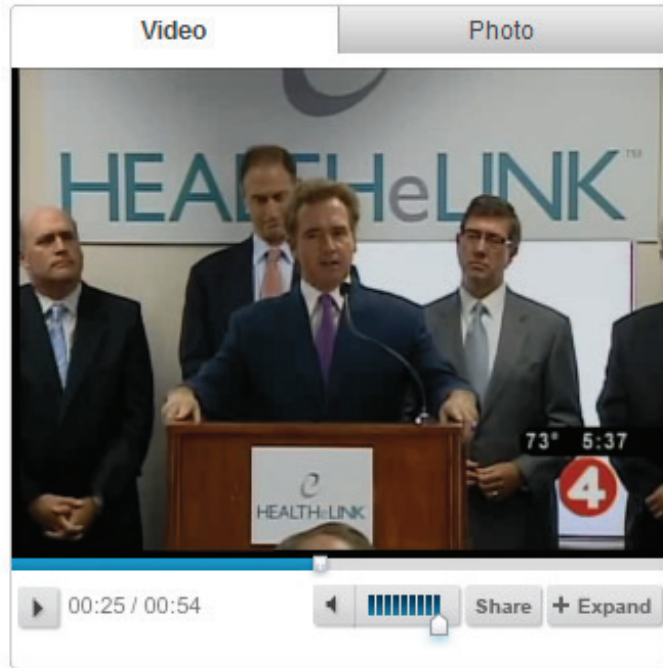
HEALTHeLINK, the Western New York Clinical Information Exchange, is a collaborative effort among various organizations to share clinical information in efficient and meaningful ways to improve the delivery of care, enhance clinical outcomes, and help control healthcare costs throughout the region. The not-for-profit organization was established through funding from The Catholic Health System, Erie County Medical Center Corporation, HealthNow New York (BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York), Independent Health Association, Kaleida Health, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Univera Healthcare and the Health Care Efficiency and Affordability

Law for New Yorkers Capital Grant Program (HEAL NY) from New York State. HEALTHeLINK also received the country's largest grant as part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Beacon Community Cooperative Agreement Program. HEALTHeLINK stakeholders include a broad representation of healthcare professionals and organizations throughout the eight-county Western New York region such as the Buffalo Academy of Medicine (BAM), Erie County Department of Health (ECDOH), State University of New York at Buffalo and the WNY R-AHEC (Rural Area Health Education Center.) For more information about HEALTHeLINK please visit www.wnyhealthelink.com.



Grant to aid treatment of diabetics

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Uncle Sam is lending a hand towards upgrading the care and treatment of diabetics.

A \$16 million federal Beacon Grant from the stimulus fund will help western New York fight its high incidences of diabetes through health information technology. Health-e-Link lets several local organizations share clinical information, and this money will help hospitals, health plans, and physicians provide better coordinated care for diabetic patients.

Rep. Brian Higgins said, "The solution to a more effective health care delivery system is not going to come from Washington, it's going to come from an early adapter, one group of individuals in a community that embraces the tools of health care reform and demonstrates to the rest of the nation how it can be done. Buffalo is such an outlier; it's such a place."

Western New York's Beacon Grant was the largest awarded in the country.

Video Link: <http://www.wivb.com/dpp/health/Grant-to-aid-treatment-of-diabetics>