

## Medical efficiency gets a boost

### Federal grant furthers and recognizes this region's HEALTHeLINK initiative

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Welcome recognition of the unprecedented collaboration among the region's hospital systems, physicians and other institutions has come in the form of a \$16.1 million federal grant that will promote the use of electronic health records and other advanced cost-cutting technology.

HEALTHeLINK has been praised for its partnership among competitors in order to promote the development of clinical information exchange. It's a good program, and deserves that praise.

The federal grant awarded to the coalition, the largest grant of its kind, was announced recently by David Blumenthal, the nation's lead official in an effort to use technology to improve health care and cut costs. It's a boost for HEALTHeLINK, which competed with more than 130 applicants nationwide to win one of only 15 grants awarded by the federally funded Beacon Project.

Western New York is poised to play a pivotal role in ushering in a new era of patient care, one that will enable doctors and other medical personnel to communicate across distances and provide comfort to patients and their families by greatly reducing the likelihood of medical error.

Already, medical personnel in this area are using technology to combat the high rate of diabetes in Western New York.

HEALTHeLINK has applications that extend beyond any one particular disease, and this electronic sharing of information has the ability to avoid potentially harmful drug interactions or other complications. Moreover, electronic information exchange—tracked by computer so that users can be identified—will ensure greater security than offered by paper files. There also are cost reductions and the potential for fewer medical malpractice cases.

The average patient may wonder why, in this technological age, medical records weren't already being shared over a secure electronic system. However, the cost of setting up an electronic system across data platforms can be prohibitive and the implementation cumbersome. Getting more and more health care providers online needs this kind of help.

In a sense, HEALTHeLINK has been a grass-roots effort among this region's hospital systems. As Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo, stated, strategies for improving health care will be developed, not in Washington, but in communities like Western New York.