

HEALTHeLINK gives first grant for e-records

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HEALTHeLINK doled out its first dollars to help local doctors convert to electronic medical records, allocating \$25,000 in direct-funding support to Limestone Primary Care Physicians in Amherst.

The technology collaborative among health insurers and medical providers awarded the money to help Limestone buy and implement an electronic medical records system, under a new program funded by the three big health insurers — Blue- Cross BlueShield of Western New York, Independent Health Association and Univera Healthcare — and run by HEALTHeLINK.

The primary care EMR Adoption program, which will also support pediatricians and OB/GYN providers, will give financial assistance to medical practices in Erie, Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming counties, as long as they also participate in one of the three insurers' networks and have not already received support from one of them.

The program offers \$5,000 per doctor for up to 500 doctors, or \$14,000 per practice for up to 167 practices, for a total of \$2.5 million in direct funding. Qualifying physician practices may also be eligible for another \$4,000 from the state's HEAL NY program.

In addition, HEALTHeLINK will provide 100 hours of consulting services to help the medical practice transform its internal processes to smooth the transition from paper to digital.

The purpose of the program and the EMRs is to enhance safety, cut costs and improve quality of care for patients, according to HEALTHeLINK.

Currently, HEALTHeLINK is working on grants with 14 practices, with 60 providers in all. The program runs through the end of the year.

“Cost is the biggest hurdle for physicians to adopt electronic medical records and use them in a meaningful way, especially for smaller physician practices,” said Daniel E. Porreca, HEALTHeLINK's executive director.

By effectively using EMRs, practices like Limestone also can qualify for federal stimulus funds to reimburse the cost of adopting the technology, HEALTHeLINK said. Otherwise, starting in 2015, the federal government will penalize medical practices that don't adopt EMRs by cutting their Medicare reimbursement.