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On The Cutting Edge



Dan Porreca, HEALTHeLINK executive director, speaks during a news conference Wednesday announcing WCA Hospital's agreement to join with the patient clinical information sharing system.

P-J photo by Kristen Johnson

WCA Hospital Joins HEALTHeLINK Patient Information Sharing System

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Imagine that you're away from home on a business trip. As you're walking out of the convention center, you trip over the curb and fall, striking your head and losing consciousness. When you're wheeled into the emergency room at the local hospital, doctors there are forced to work with only the most basic information about you — a scary

prospect, especially for those with other medical problems.

That's where HEALTHeLINK comes in. HEALTHeLINK is an electronic information-sharing system that allows hospitals, physicians, pharmacies, insurers and laboratories secure access to a patient's medical records. The system isn't an electronic medical record, but is instead a technology platform that allows information to flow easily amongst health

care professionals even when they're not using the same electronic medical record system.

On Wednesday, WCA Hospital announced it is the first rural community hospital to take part in HEALTHeLINK, also known as the Western New York Clinical Information Exchange, a significant step toward the hospital's implementation of electronic medical records.

"This collaboration gives

patients, physicians, insurers and health care providers a simple way to access vital clinical information from one place," said Betsy Wright, the hospital's CEO. "Our participation in this clinical exchange will enhance the care we're able to provide to our patients. It allows us to share information with various health care systems, radiologists, pharmacies, physician practices and hospitals."

See WCA, Page A-3

WCA

From Page A-1

HEALTHeLINK makes it unnecessary for participating patients to try and remember things such as the date and results of their last cholesterol test, the names of medication they've taken or the dates of significant medical events. With HEALTHeLINK, physicians will be able to access — and update, if necessary — that information electronically.

Patients at WCA Hospital will be asked if they wish to participate in HEALTHeLINK. Once a patient's consent is given, their clinical information will be stored on a secure server and made accessible to any health care professional who has high-speed Internet access. Consent forms are also available at registration kiosks throughout the hospital.

Dan Porreca, the executive director of HEALTHeLINK, said the system is "about saving lives and money."

"If you were ever unconscious or otherwise unable to provide information to health care professionals, HEALTHeLINK literally

"Thanks to our partnership with WCA Hospital, patients here are going to experience firsthand what the promise of technology holds for health care."

Dan Porreco,

HEALTHeLINK executive director

becomes your voice," he said.

Information stored and shared via HEALTHeLINK is "more secure than records stored in paper form," Porreca said. He said 96 percent of patients who are asked to consent to HEALTHeLINK agree to do so. The organization has received 60,000 consent forms over the last several months.

"Thanks to our partnership with WCA Hospital, patients here are going to experience firsthand what the promise of technology holds for health care," he said. "Patients who consent to using HEALTHeLINK will essentially have a body of information following them no matter where they go."

Dr. Wolf-Dieter Krahn, a private practitioner on staff at WCA Hospital, called the partnership "significant."

"Consider that with HEALTHeLINK, we can share a patient's clinical information with places like Roswell, other hospitals in the area and other physician practices," he said.

"There's no need now to send a messenger or mail records. It's immediate."

HEALTHeLINK is a collaborative consortium that currently includes The Catholic Health System, The Erie County Medical Center Corporation, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Western New York, Independent Health Association, Kaleida Health, Roswell Park Cancer Institute and Univera Healthcare.