

Saturday, April 17, 2010

## Mt. St. Mary's, Memorial Medical Center join HEALTHeLINK

Story and photo  
by Joshua Maloni

Judith Maness says the idea that Mount St. Mary's Hospital and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center are at odds is simply not true.

"Too often our respective hospitals are viewed as being too competitive; where Joe and I have been able to collaborate, we do just that because we know collaboration is in the best interests of the patients we serve," Maness, Mount St. Mary's president and CEO, said Monday.

Maness and Joseph Ruffolo, Memorial's president and CEO, attended a press conference where it was announced their respective organizations had joined HEALTHeLINK, the Western New York clinical information exchange.

"Today's announcement is another example of that collaboration," Maness said. "HEALTHeLINK will allow physicians who are affiliated with both hospitals to review patient health information more efficiently and effectively. We both welcome HEALTHeLINK to our community and look forward to working with the clinical information exchange to bring the promise of technology to patients throughout Niagara County."

HEALTHeLINK was established in 2004 as an offshoot of the HealthNet administrative data exchange. Its mission statement is to "create and maintain a secure and reliable infrastructure for the timely and accurate electronic exchange of clinical information among health care providers, insurers and other medical professionals."

In other words, at the time of medical treatment, "It is so important to be able to access the health record of that patient to avoid duplicate treatment," Ruffolo said.

"Your electronic record liter-



HEALTHeLINK announced this week that Mount St. Mary's Hospital and Health Center and Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center have joined its program. When medically necessary, both facilities are now able to access and share patient health information electronically with hundreds of health care providers across the region. Shown above, Judith Maness, Mount St. Mary's president and CEO, shakes hands with Joseph Ruffolo, Memorial Medical Center's president and CEO. Daniel Porreca, HEALTHeLINK's executive director, joins them in the picture. (photo by Joshua Maloni)

ally becomes your voice," said HEALTHeLINK Executive Director Daniel Porreca. At the point of care, doctors will have what they need to more accurately address the situation.

"At its core, it's about saving money," Porreca said. "And more importantly, it's about saving lives."

Dr. Michael Cropp, president and CEO of Independent Health and chairman of the HEALTHeLINK board of directors, said the online sharing of information represents a "new age of health care."

"Patients won't have to worry about not having their information available," he said. "It will follow them wherever they go."

To participate in the information exchange, patients must sign a consent form. The document will be administered via local doctors'

offices and at the hospitals. HEALTHeLINK currently has 25 million reports (and 1.7 million are added monthly), almost 85,000 patients, works with 275 providers and almost 2,000 users (medical staff).

At this point, Porreca said there is no fee for doctors or medical institutions to join HEALTHeLINK. Funding for the information exchange group was provided through upwards of \$9 million in total contributions from The Catholic Health System of Buffalo, Erie County Medical Center Corporation, HealthNow New York (BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York), Independent Health Association, Kaleida Health, Roswell Park Cancer Institute and Excellus (Univera Healthcare), as well as a \$3.5 million HEAL 1 grant from New York state's HealNY initiative.