

Two area medical practices get aid to install electronic record systems

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NIAGARA FALLS — Two family medical practices in the Niagara Falls area are the first in Niagara County to receive money from a local agency backed by health insurers to install electronic medical record systems to replace the reams of patient records that now are written on paper.

Most medical practices are expected to adopt similar systems by 2015, when the federal government will begin reducing Medicare reimbursements to physicians who fail to make the change from paper to electronic record-keeping.

The first two practices to receive money through a new program called HEALTHeLINK are Niagara Family Medicine Associates, a group of primary care physicians with offices in Niagara Falls and Lewiston, and Dr. Ronald J. Clarke, a doctor of osteopathic family medicine in Wheatfield.

Niagara Family Medicine Associates received \$50,000, and Clarke was awarded \$10,000 toward the purchase of their electronic medical record systems. In addition to the funding, HEALTHeLINK is providing 100 hours of training to each practice to help smooth the transition from paper to electronic medical records.

Effective use of the new systems will help the two medical practices to qualify for federal stimulus funds.

HEALTHeLINK is a clinical information exchange funded by BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York, Independent Health and Univera Healthcare. The program is designed to help Western New York physicians implement electronic medical records “to enhance safety and improve clinical quality for their patients.”

“Cost is the biggest hurdle for physicians to adopt electronic medical records, especially for smaller physician practices,” according to Daniel

E. Porreca, executive director of HEALTHeLINK. “Our collaboration with the area’s three major health insurers provides significant opportunity to increase electronic medical record adoption.”

Physicians who practice in any of the eight counties of Western New York and are participating providers with any of the three major health insurers are eligible for financial help through this

program. It is open to pediatricians and providers of obstetrics and gynecological services as well as to providers of family care.

Physician practices that fail to begin the transition to electronic record-keeping risk being disqualified from federal stimulus money to help pay for the change.