

## Using technology to fight diabetes in WNY

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*With Dr. David Blumenthal, national coordinator for health information technology, at left, Daniel Porreca, executive director HEALTHeLINK, speaks about the \$16.1 million grant. Bill Wippert / Buffalo News*

Medical experts are harnessing health information technology to try to fight the high rate of diabetes in Western New York.

The nation's point man for a project that aims to tap technology to improve care and cut costs was in Buffalo today. He announced that a local coalition has received a \$16.1 million federal grant -- the largest grant of its kind -- to help promote the use electronic health records and other cutting-edge information technology.

HEALTHeLink is a partnership between some of the region's largest health care providers and insurers. The group competed with more than 130 applicants nationwide and snared one of only 15 grants awarded by the federally-funded Beacon Project.

Western New York has an opportunity to play a "transformational" role in reshaping how the medical community tracks patient care, said David Blumenthal, national coordinator for the federal government's health information technology information.

Blumenthal spent 30 years as a primary care physician. In an interview with The Buffalo News, he explained how the use of health information technology can improve the coordination of care, provide better prevent methods and eliminate inefficiencies. Through the exchange of information via electronic health records, he said medical experts can avoid everything from administering duplicative tests, to making sure that prescriptions are compatible with treatments that are given.

"That coordination is absolutely vital to the control of a chronic condition like diabetes."

Electronic health records can even provide simple -- albeit time-saving information such as telling physicians which radiology facility has a patient's X-rays, said Dr. Michael Cropp, president and CEO of Independent Health Association.

The grant was announced at a news conference at HEALTHeLINK's offices on Walden Avenue in Cheektowaga. Strategies for improving health care will be developed -- not in Washington -- but in communities like Western New York, said Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo.

Doctors who convert to electronic records systems receive government incentives in the form of higher Medicaid or Medicare reimbursements.

As part of the grant, medical experts will be required to meet certain outcomes. For example, they will have to show reductions in emergency room visits and in hospital readmission rates for diabetic patients. Another goal will involve increasing flu vaccination rates among diabetic patients.

State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines also attended the news conference.