



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ON MAY 2, 2011

Central New York's health information exchange connects four area hospitals, lab to improve patient care and continues its expansion across CNY

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – Community General Hospital, Crouse Hospital, St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center, SUNY Upstate Medical University Hospital, and Laboratory Alliance of Central New York, LLC are now connected to a health information exchange that allows authorized, participating health care providers to securely access patients' consolidated medical histories for better care. In addition to the Syracuse area health care facilities, the online health information exchange, named [HealthConnections](#)™, is actively working to connect 15 community hospitals across Central and Northern New York.

HealthConnections is the Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO) of Central New York and is one of 12 RHIOs in New York state. HealthConnections provides authorized health care professionals with secure access to patient medical records in real time to deliver more comprehensive, efficient and cost-effective care. HealthConnections also governs the online exchange of medical information and provides security protections with a sophisticated, encrypted system powered by Axolotl Corp., a leading provider of products and services for secure health information management. Only authorized medical personnel can access the online health information exchange. Patients benefit from fewer duplicate tests and procedures, faster second opinions, a reduced risk of errors caused by illegible handwriting or incomplete records, and more informed care during office visits and emergencies.

The information available in HealthConnections comes from the electronic medical records of participating health care providers, including hospitals, laboratories, physician practices, and radiology and imaging centers. Using HealthConnections, patients' electronic health information, such as histories, labs, reports and diagnostic tests, from all of their participating health care providers is collected in one single, secure view online.

"The health information exchange is an important step forward in improving health care in the Central New York community," said Dr. David Duggan, president of the Onondaga County Medical Society. "Immediate electronic access to patient medical information is crucial in emergency situations to improve diagnoses and outcomes."

Patients must provide consent to each of their participating health care provider organizations for their medical information to be shared electronically by authorized physicians. If a patient has not yet signed a consent form but is involved in a life-threatening emergency situation, physicians are able to access HealthConnections on a one-time emergency basis unless the patient has specifically declined consent. To opt out of HealthConnections, patients need to specifically decline access to each of their health care providers.

The state and federal government are promoting the creation of community-supported RHIOs in a movement toward national standards for the secure electronic exchange of health information, and more efficient, cost-effective care. Health information exchanges have proven to reduce the cost of health care through the reduction of duplicate tests and procedures and by providing instant access to complete medical information. RHIOs across New York state are receiving positive responses and support, with very high levels of signed consent from patients.

"The Health Advancement Collaborative of Central New York has raised nearly \$3.5 million to support the creation of the RHIO. This includes \$900,000 in federal appropriations funds, \$2.1 million in New York State HEAL 5 funds, and \$350,000 in corporate contributions from Excellus, MVP Health Care and National Grid. Our member organizations, The Hospital Executive Council, Onondaga County Medical

Society, Metropolitan Development Authority, Syracuse Chamber of Commerce, Manufacturers Association of Central New York, Excellus and MVP Healthcare also contributed not only financial support, but also thought leadership and countless hours to make the RHIO a reality”, said Rob Hack, executive director of HealtheConnections. “This effort represents how powerful collaboration can be when all stakeholders are committed to delivering value to the communities in our region. We thank all our contributors and supporters.”

Physician practices with electronic medical systems are also being connected to HealtheConnections. Over time, HealtheConnections will continue to connect physician practices, adding laboratories, radiology and imaging centers and long-term care facilities from communities across Central New York.

“We are pleased to be working with HealtheConnections, as it continues its expansion across Central and Northern New York,” said Glenn Keet, president of Axolotl, Corp. “HealtheConnections provides the necessary groundwork for improving the delivery of health care, and we are proud to power its secure health information exchange.”

About HealtheConnections

HealtheConnections (pronounced “healthy-connections”) is the Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO) of Central New York that is responsible for overseeing the secure, electronic health information exchange that gives authorized, participating medical providers access to complete patient medical histories and information in real-time. HealtheConnections was launched in May 2010 and has since connected four hospitals and one lab. Expansion in 2011 will include 19 hospitals across 11 counties, physician offices, with other health care facilities to follow.

HealtheConnections was formed as the highest priority for the Health Advancement Collaborative of Central New York (HAC-CNY). Established in 2005, HAC-CNY is a multi-stakeholder organization that has patient, physician, hospital, insurer, employer and pharmacy representation. Its board of directors is equally represented by businesses and organizations as well as the health care sector with the mission to advance the quality, access and safety of health care in Central New York while maintaining or decreasing costs. For more information, please visit <http://healtheconnections.org/>.

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