

# Upstate RHIO collaboration links providers, hospitals in a 44-county region

BY ERIC REINHARDT

JOURNAL STAFF

SYRACUSE — Four upstate New York regional health-information organizations (RHIOs) on Sept. 13 announced new connectivity allowing “secure” exchange of electronic medical records between health-care professionals in Syracuse, Buffalo, Rochester, and Albany.

This new connectivity between the upstate RHIOs links health-care providers, including 110 hospitals, in a 44-county region and allows them to “securely” share 5.4 million patient-health records, according to HealthConnections.

HealthConnections (pronounced “healthy connections”) is the RHIO serving 11 counties in Central New York, according to the organization’s website.

The counties include Onondaga, Cayuga, Oswego, Madison, Cortland, Tompkins, Oneida, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, and St. Lawrence.

The collaboration is seen as an “extension of our network” in connecting with the neighboring upstate RHIO, says Robert (Rob) Hack, executive director, HealthConnections.

“What it really helps is when we’ve got care that’s coordinated outside of the region where a patient may go to Rochester for service or

go to Albany for services or if a person is in that geographic area and has a problem, we’ve now got the ability for providers to communicate across regions,” Hack explains.

Through this new connectivity, providers will be able to “better coordinate care and reduce health-care costs,” Hack contends.

“We have [more than two] thousand users connected to HealthConnections,” Hack says, noting a “user” could be a provider organization or a member of its clinical staff.

During any given month, more than 1,000 providers are accessing or receiving information through the health-information exchange, he adds.

The new connectivity allows health-care professionals from each region to send and receive EMRs by way of “secure and encrypted” messaging through the capability of each RHIO’s Health Information Service Provider (HISP) based upon the Direct Project protocol.

Hack refers to it as a “secure email system,” allowing providers to avoid the Internet for sensitive-patient data.

The Direct Project protocol enables standards-based health-information exchange in support of meaningful-use measures, including communication of summary-care records, referrals, discharge summaries, and other clinical documents in support of



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continuity of care and medication reconciliation, and communication of laboratory results to providers.

Meaningful use is the set of standards

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defined by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) incentive programs that govern the use of electronic health records and allows eligible providers and hospitals to earn incentive payments by meeting specific criteria, according to website [healthit.gov](http://healthit.gov), a government website with details and policy information about

the sharing of electronic health records.

The upstate RHIOs are hoping to take the next step and connect to the HISP provider for the downstate organizations sometime in 2014 so health-care providers statewide can share information, Hack says.

The upstate collaboration includes Hixny, the RHIO serving New York's Capital Region, according to HealthConnections.

Hixny established "similar connectivity"

with Vermont in July as it worked to support a region where patients seek health-care services in Northern New York and Vermont, Mark McKinney, CEO of Hixny, said in the news release.

"We're happy to collaborate with the RHIOs in Central and Western New York as well as those in New England to expand this service area. These are important collaborations as Hixny prepares to launch its secure patient

portal in 2014. Patients in our region will be empowered to securely view, download, and transmit their own medical records via Direct throughout upstate New York and to an ever-growing service area," McKinney said.

Hixny connects more than 1.55 million people in 17 counties throughout the Capital District and Northern New York.

Contact **Reinhardt** at [ereinhardt@cnybj.com](mailto:ereinhardt@cnybj.com)