

Health data nonprofits agree to merger

HealtheConnections and HealthlinkNY, which each operate regional health information organizations, will merge under the HealtheConnections name, connecting medical records from Syracuse to Westchester County.

The merger will bring together data from 8,700 providers in 26 counties of the central, Southern Tier and Hudson Valley regions of the state.

Health information exchanges, like these two nonprofits, allow hospitals and doctors to share patients' medical data, with their consent, more easily. Obtaining data on patients from other health care organizations can help providers make better-informed decision and avoid duplicative care.

The merger will bring the number of regional health information organizations to seven. When providers search for patient data, queries are run on data stored by each RHIO, which must be viewed separately. The deal will make it easier for physicians to access data stored across the two organizations, said Rob Hack, president and CEO of HealtheConnections, who will lead the combined organization

"When two RHIOs come together, we have more data to build directly into a patient record," Hack said. Staci Romeo, executive director of HealthlinkNY, will become vice president of strategic engagement services of HealtheConnections.

The organizations had announced a partnership in the fall before proceeding with the merger. The deal still needs approval from the state attorney general.

In Westchester alone, Healthlink is connected with 417 sites, including all 12 of the county's hospitals. HealtheConnections is working to identify a location for a new Westchester office, Hack said.