

SPECIAL REPORT

HEALTH CARE

STHL launches revamped patient-index service

BY TRACI DELORE

JOURNAL STAFF

BINGHAMTON — Southern Tier HealthLink (STHL) New York recently introduced its enhanced master patient-index service, which seeks to help local health-care organizations consolidate patient information and reduce duplicate patient medical records.

STHL has operated an index service for years, says Executive Director Christina Galanis, but the former system had limitations that prevented it from doing everything STHL wanted.

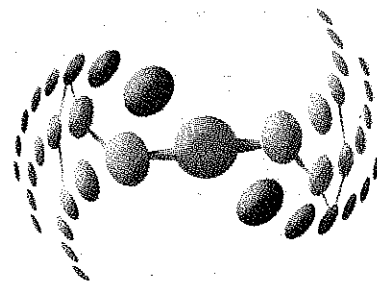
The two main goals of the index system are to make sure patient information on record is the most up to date and to provide an outbound feed of information to hospitals to eliminate duplicate records (when there is more than one file of medical information on a person). That can happen because each health-care provider creates its own file; so a person can have single files at several locations, Galanis says.



It can also occur when incorrect information is provided or entered into the electronic medical-record system at a provider. For example, if someone keys in the wrong birth date when trying to access a file, there won't be any correct results for that patient. In many cases, a new record is simply started so the patient can receive services.

The result is multiple files for just one patient, several of which may contain incorrect information. "I've seen even four duplicate records come to us," Galanis says.

Fortunately, the new index service, which launched in mid-June, can take those four records, scan them for similarities, and with nearly 100-percent accuracy, compile different records that belong to the same person and verify that all information —



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such as birthday, telephone number, name, or address — is correct.

That consolidated and correct file can then be returned to health-care providers that treat the particular patient, Galanis says.

The result is that providers aren't bogged down with duplicate files and incorrect information, while patients can receive quick and proper care.

"It's all about information and timely in-

formation, and not an overload of information," Galanis says.

STHL contracted with InterComponentWare, Inc., of Wayne, Pa., in December to build the indexing and integration components for the system.

Galanis couldn't provide an exact cost for the project, but says it was funded through a \$7.1 million HEAL 5 state grant that the agency received in 2008.

The newly revamped system tracks information across six counties for eight hospitals, more than 800 physicians, and 470,000 residents.

The nonprofit STHL (www.sthlny.com), established in 2005, says its mission is to bring together health-care providers and consumers to improve quality, access, and safety while reducing costs.

The organization has nine employees and an annual operating budget of about \$1.7 million. □

Contact **DeLore** at
tgregory@tgbj.com