

Minors' health data OK'd for link

BY HENRY L. DAVIS

NEWS MEDICAL REPORTER

Getting minors' medical records in HEALTHeLINK, the regional system for sharing health information electronically among hospitals and doctors, has been a problem for the health data exchange.

But that will change now because of a recent clarification in state regulations to allow parents or legal guardians to consent to having a child's health information included, said Dan Porreca, executive director of HEALTHeLINK.

HEALTHeLINK and other health record exchanges in the state and country seek to improve access to patient in-

formation to decrease duplicate tests, avoid medication errors and improve diagnoses, especially in emergencies when a physician has little or no knowledge about a patient. About 880,000 patients and 4,000 physicians in Western New York have consented to participate in the health exchange.

Until now, HEALTHeLINK did not allow parents to give consent for their children ages 10 to 17 to participate in HEALTHeLINK.

"The change in state policy means pediatricians can get better access to information about these patients," Porreca said.

It is also helpful in instances when the child's grandparent

or another caregiver takes the patient in for an appointment and they do not have the child's medical history readily available, he said. That record will be accessible on HEALTHeLINK.

Porreca cautioned that physicians need to know that a minor patient's record may contain sensitive information that remains protected under state law from disclosure to a parent or guardian without the minor's written consent. Such information includes reproductive health services, mental health or substance use treatment, HIV testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.

email: hdavis@buffnews.com