



Collaborative 'Rochester Model' Gets Spotlight for Hypertension Program

Business, health care partnership featured in national medical journal

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The fast-moving effort led by business leaders, in partnership with healthcare organizations, to make the Finger Lakes region the healthiest community in the country serves as a model for action that other cities could follow, according to a medical journal.

The "Rochester Model" was created by the Finger Lakes Health Collaborative -- a partnership of the [Rochester Business Alliance](#), [Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency](#), and area hospitals and leaders -- to reduce the cost of local healthcare. It has set its sights on reducing hypertension, or high blood pressure, and was featured online by the *Journal of Clinical Hypertension*.

"We have a one-of-a-kind model in place here in Rochester and what makes it unique is that the business community drove the efforts, stepping up because they want to help solve a problem that makes it challenging to do business," said cardiologist [John D. Bisognano, M.D., Ph.D.](#), director of the hypertension program at the [University of Rochester Medical Center](#), and lead author of the paper. "There are many organizations working to solve health problems in every community, but this one is truly collaborative and making strides toward changing lives."

The RBA began studying ways to reduce the cost of health care coverage for its employees in 2005. Frustrated by rising insurance costs, the group was anxious to curb spending and improve the bottom line for area businesses. And, executives recognized they could not successfully impact the system without joining forces with community and health care leaders.

"We're creating an infrastructure that can help us with collaboration and move the needle on high blood pressure in our region and in the future, hope to look at other important conditions, such as obesity and diabetes," said Paul Speranza, an author of the paper and chair of the health care team. He is vice chairman, secretary and general counsel at Wegmans Food Markets Inc. "We've learned that we do much better as a community when we work together and get better results."

The RBA health care group includes executives from Eastman Kodak Co., Xerox Corp., Bausch & Lomb, Paychex, Jasco Tools, Rochester Institute of Technology and Wegmans.

Joining with the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency (FLHSA), the group brought together healthcare leaders, independent providers, physicians, insurers, community-based organizations, organized labor, representatives of local, state, and federal government

The journal article focuses on the FLHC's efforts to control hypertension in the community, a leading cause of strokes, heart attacks and kidney and heart diseases. About one-third of adults in the region have high blood pressure and the group aims to help 85 percent of them get it under control and keep it under control. The most recent data indicates that only 63 percent have successfully reached a control rate of 140/90 or better. If

effective, the effort could mean a potential savings for the Finger Lakes region of as much as \$8.5 million annually.

“We chose to work on reducing the incidence of high blood pressure because it’s a condition that people understand. Some people know if they have it, but don’t do anything about it. But if they’re willing to control their blood pressure, we can see dramatic change in a relatively short period of time,” Speranza said.

Primary care physician [Howard Beckman, M.D.](#), another co-author of the paper, said the initiative helps reinforce what doctors recommend to their patients every day.

“This project is helping create real change in how health care is delivered because there are educational and motivational programs taking place in our churches, barbershops and hairdressers, and in the workplaces encouraging people to take a more active role in their care and to be knowledgeable about what they need to do to remain healthy,” said Beckman, who has practiced medicine for 35 years.

“We’ll be able to back up this effort with real data because we’re tracking the numbers of people who have hypertension and we’re going to be monitoring the incidence of stroke, heart attacks, heart failure and the initiation of dialysis to see if we’re successful and that these conditions should all decline,” said Beckman, director of strategic innovation at the FLHSA and clinical professor of Medicine at URMC.

The RBA’s early successes include: a generic drugs initiative, which has increased generic fill rates by 20 percentage points and saved more than \$490 million over five years, and the Rochester Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO), a secure electronic health information exchange that gives authorized medical providers access to information such as test results, lab reports, radiology results, medication history, and insurance eligibility. To date, more than 800,000 people have agreed to have their medical information included in the system, which has been characterized by the commissioner of the New York State Department of Health as the state’s most advanced RHIO.

“There’s no other community in America that’s attempted to do what we are, but we have the community resources, dedication and in time, we’ll get the results,” Speranza said.

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