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Contacts:

Corey Zeigler, FDRHPO Health Information Technology Program Manager (315)755-2020 ext. 11

Denise Young, FDRHPO Executive Director, (315) 755-2020 ext. 10

### **Electronic network connects hospitals, primary care doctors and specialists for better patient care**

The Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization is proud to announce the following partner hospitals are now connected to a secure online health information exchange that allows authorized, participating health care providers to securely access patients' consolidated medical histories to provide better care: Carthage Area Hospital, E. J. Noble Hospital, Lewis County General Hospital, Samaritan Medical Center and River Hospital. In addition to the north country health care facilities, the online health information exchange, named HealtheConnections, has connected 15 community hospitals across the 11 counties of Central and Northern New York.

The goal of this project, called the North Country Health Information Partnership, or N-CHIP, is for providers to use electronic medical records to share essential health information – such as histories, labs, reports and diagnostic tests from all of the patient's participating health care providers – in one single, secure online location, supporting local and regional care coordination patterns. In this way, the latest information technology is being leveraged to restore some old-fashioned values to modern medical practice. It's what's called a Patient Centered Medical Home model of health care delivery, where a patient is seen not as simply as the injury or condition at hand, but as a whole person with a complete medical history. The primary care doctor acts as a hub – a home – for coordinating all of the patient's care. As more and more health care providers in the north country begin incorporating information technology into their practices, more are earning national certification as Patient Centered Medical Homes.

Now that hospitals are connected to HealtheConnections, primary care doctors, with patient consent, can access information about a patient's hospitalization, including the nature of the complaint, any tests the patient underwent and what medications he or she is taking. Ninety-five percent of primary care providers in southern St. Lawrence, Lewis and Jefferson counties are taking part in this project, as well as allergists and pulmonologists. All participating providers will be connected to the network by March of next year. In the future, as primary care doctors and specialists are connected, the sharing will work in reverse, too, with hospitals able to access patient information from primary care and specialists' records. Over the next three years, a new federal grant will enable N-CHIP to add more specialized care providers in cardiology, orthopedics and others, as well as the Children's Clinic, to HealtheConnections. Patients will begin to benefit from fewer duplicate tests and procedures, faster second opinions, a reduced risk of errors caused by illegible handwriting or incomplete records and more informed care during office visits and emergencies.

“The health information exchange allows for the most accurate and comprehensive medical information on each patient to be viewed in one place. And that’s important because accurate and timely information is key to good care,” said Dr. Steven Lyndaker, an internist in internal medicine and co-medical director of the N-CHIP project. “For people with chronic, complicated medical conditions, especially – who may have drug interaction issues or previous sensitivities they might not always remember to tell their doctor about – timely information like this can be literally life-saving.”

As they visit with their doctors, north country residents will be asked to sign consent forms for their information to be securely viewed by their care providers. If a patient has not yet signed a consent form but is involved in a life-threatening emergency, physicians are able to access critical health information on a one-time emergency basis unless the patient has specifically declined consent.

HealthConnections is the Regional Health Information Organization (RHIO) of Central New York and is one of 12 RHIOs in New York state. The state and federal government are promoting the creation of community-supported Regional Health Information Organizations in a movement toward national standards for the secure electronic exchange of health information and more efficient, cost-effective care. Health information exchanges have proven to improve the quality of health care and help reduce its cost. RHIOs across New York state are receiving positive responses and support, with very high levels of signed consent from patients.

The Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization is proud to have moved the north country to the forefront of the movement to use information technology to improve health care for patients. New York and California are generally considered the leaders in health IT in the U.S. In New York, the N-CHIP project has been recognized as a leader in rural health coordination. We’ll soon be one of only two sites in the country to have the most advanced, coordinated programs for handling diagnostic tests for patients, for example.

FDRHPO is happy provide interviews with our staff on request. We can also connect reporters with hospital representatives who will be glad to discuss in more detail what the online health information exchange means for doctors and patients.

### **About FDRHPO**

The Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization is a partnership of hospitals, health care providers and military medical leadership serving the Fort Drum region, including Jefferson, Lewis and southern St. Lawrence counties. Our work helps to create understanding of the health care needs in the area, identify gaps where services are needed, and find opportunities for growth and improvement. Our goal is to help the medical community better serve the needs of civilians and military service members alike.

### **About the North Country Health Information Partnership (N-CHIP)**

FDRHPO’S North Country Health Information Partnership is a collaboration of hospitals and physicians in Jefferson, Lewis and southern St. Lawrence Counties committed to implementing and using health information technology to improve health care for north country residents.