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IBM part of health consortium

By Craig Wolf

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IBM Corp. and several groups working to create electronic medical records networks have teamed up in a federally funded consortium. Four contracts involving IBM and three other information technology companies will link them with several networks in geographies across the nation. The total investment by Health and Human Services is \$18.6 million for the four groups.

In the Hudson Valley, the Taconic Health Information Network and Community, called THINC, will collaborate with IBM. Big Blue will also partner with two similar networks in North Carolina.

The Taconic project is well under way, and was recently ranked highly in a nationwide comparison.

"What this will do is allow us to make sure we're moving even more rapidly and make it a national example of how to create these regional health organizations," said Neil de Crescenzo, vice president for global health care with IBM. De Crescenzo added he was impressed with ! what Taconic had done.

Teams from IBM in the Hudson Valley and in North Carolina will work with the Taconic specialists while others based in North Carolina will work with networks there. The teams come from an IBM Global Services division known as Business Consulting Services.

Dr. John Blair, the physician who heads Taconic's network project, said of the new project, "What it's doing is piggybacking on what we have done so far." "What we have is a data exchange in the Hudson Valley where information can move from hospitals and labs to that specific doctor," Blair said.

Expanding networks

This project involves taking it to the next level, creating the ability to smoothly move data among the participating regions in New York and North Carolina. Similar work would be done by Accenture, ComputerSciences Corp. and Northrop Grumman, each of which would work with three health networks. Later, all 12 networks involved would be able to communicate, Blair said. In a statement Thursday, Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt said the grants would help develop prototypes for a Nationwide Health Information Network that would create secure, personal electronic health records "that can follow consumers throughout their lives."

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