

SUCCESS STORY

HealthlinkNY Navigates an HIE Merger, Boosts Participation and Utilization with Help from Iatric Systems Professional Services



OBJECTIVE: HealthlinkNY wanted to continue offering a fully-functional Health Information Exchange (HIE) for their region that would be embraced by hospitals and hundreds of other care facilities including: home care agencies, clinical practices, behavioral health facilities, FQHC's and health homes, and public health departments. But first, they had to work through a merger, with all the operational and technology challenges required to bring two HIE networks together into one.

SITUATION: HealthlinkNY is a Qualified Entity funded by the New York State Department of Health. It was founded in 2015 with the merger of Southern Tier HealthLink and Taconic Health Information Network and Community, and operates the HIE for a 13 county region in Southern Tier, Catskills, the Hudson Valley in New York, and portions of Pennsylvania. With few (if any) models to follow, two sets of processes and methodologies to reconcile, and many integration projects already underway, they realized they needed outside expertise to help guide and manage the transition.

SOLUTION: HealthlinkNY contracted with Iatric Systems Professional Services for two expert resources. One, an interim CTO/COO put processes and collaboration tools in place to achieve the goals set forth by HealthlinkNY leadership. The other, an interim Regional Director, negotiated dozens of HIE accounts and managed their onboarding, using his integration experience to help providers incorporate the HIE into their workflows.

RESULTS: HealthlinkNY has emerged as a unified organization — streamlined, consistent, and responsive. They're now in a much stronger position to help clients utilize HIE services, increasing participation and usage in hospitals, long-term care facilities, private practices, and health departments. In 2016, HealthlinkNY engaged at least 130 clients, including signing 56 new participation agreements. They also are pursuing new use cases for leveraging HIE data such as predictive modeling with analytics, enhanced alerting features, and directed data exchange.

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President and CEO
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Merging two HIEs — bringing together different methodologies to create one — can be daunting. That was the challenge in 2015 when Southern Tier HealthLink merged with Taconic Health Information Network and Community (THINC) to form HealthlinkNY, an HIE serving 13 counties in the Hudson Valley, Catskills, Southern Tier of New York State and portions of Pennsylvania. They engaged experts from Iatric Systems Professional Services to oversee technology and operations that resulted from the merger, and position the new organization to fulfill its promise.

The HIE was co-located with two main offices, and there were no blueprints to follow. “We were starting from the ground up with our connectivity and processes in the Hudson Valley,” explains Christina Galanis, HealthlinkNY President and CEO, adding that the merger occurred during a very hectic time with many hospital integration projects and new HIE use cases underway or planned. “I did not want to lose momentum, and that made Iatric Systems the resource we were looking for. In addition to their strong healthcare IT experience and project management skills, they saw the “big picture” of what we wanted our HIE to accomplish.”

Expert #1: The Interim CTO/COO

Since January 2015, Dennis Sherba, Practice Director with Iatric Systems Professional Services, was contracted to HealthlinkNY and has served as interim CTO/COO. His overall responsibility was ensuring a smooth transition, and making sure that HealthlinkNY achieved its goals set forth by the statewide health information network (SHIN-NY), and its CEO and Board of Directors. He also helped the newly merged organization navigate policies that affected its workflows and clients.

A key part of Dennis’ role was to help HealthlinkNY’s people and divisions work together. He selected technologies that were needed and managed their implementation, including project management software, a customer relationship management (CRM) system, new collaboration tools, and new HIE technologies such as an Interface Engine. He developed annual review processes, mentored staff, worked with managers to ensure their departments were meeting goals, and performed many steps to help the merger succeed. Finally, he put in place an organizational and technological roadmap for HealthlinkNY to leverage its HIE and new services in new ways going forward.

Expert #2: The Regional Director

HealthlinkNY needed a strong technical presence in the Hudson Valley, where many projects were taking shape. “We needed to make major strides in a hurry, so I called Iatric Systems and asked for help,” Galanis says. Since November 2015, Jeremy Smelski, a project manager for Iatric Systems Professional Services, served as Regional Director at the Hudson Valley office. He oversaw the account management and deployment teams, using his expertise in technology, negotiations, and project management to boost provider participation and usage.

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Jeremy was also actively involved in extending the HealthlinkNY HIE to long-term care centers, private practices, mental health facilities, and public health departments. He supervised many technical projects along the way, from EMR integration to building networks for image exchange and routing results. During his time at HealthlinkNY, Jeremy led the team that was responsible for signing 56 new participation agreements and updating many more. He also played a key internal role by educating and mentoring staff throughout the merger.

Stronger as One

HealthlinkNY has been able to make co-location an advantage, enabling many more healthcare providers to participate in and leverage HIE services while improving internal productivity. "We've seen the value of partnering with a knowledgeable and experienced technology and process vendor with a deep healthcare background," Galanis adds. "Iatric Systems has enabled our staff to focus on serving our HIE clients, without technology or operations getting in the way."

