



**BlueCross BlueShield
Association**

An Association of Independent
Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans

News Release

Blue Cross and Blue Shield
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Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association Spearheads Major Initiative to Improve Healthcare Quality, Increase Cost Efficiency

More than 800 Blue Distinction® Designations Have Been Awarded To Facilities Across 45 States

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) announced today that its Blue Distinction designation is demonstrating meaningful differences in healthcare outcomes and value, through collaboration with employer groups, providers and medical organizations to provide consumers with important quality information.

Blue Distinction is a nationwide program that recognizes medical facilities that meet objective, evidence-based thresholds for clinical quality developed in collaboration with expert physicians and medical organizations. This designation provides consumers with a credible, easily identifiable means of selecting facilities that best meet their individual specialty care needs. To date, more than 800 Blue Distinction Designations for Specialty Care have been awarded in 45 states and the District of Columbia in the areas of Bariatric Surgery, Cardiac Care, Complex and Rare Cancers and Transplants.

“The ever-expanding number of Blue Distinction Centers is a testament to the work Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies are doing nationwide to enhance healthcare quality, value and access,” said Scott P. Serota, BCBSA president and CEO. “This is a true collaboration among key healthcare stakeholders, and together we are demonstrating that achieving improved clinical outcomes is a reality, not just rhetoric.”

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Blue Distinction Centers for Cardiac Care[®] were chosen because they met rigorous selection criteria that aim to significantly raise healthcare quality in America.

A recent study, conducted by HealthCore, Inc., a subsidiary of WellPoint, Inc., confirmed that readmission rates for certain procedures performed at Blue Distinction Centers for Cardiac Care were lower than those performed at other hospitals for Blue Cross Blue Shield patients. Specifically, the study found that patients of the centers experienced:

- 26 percent lower readmission rates for bypass surgery and 37 percent lower for outpatient angioplasty, based on 30-day cardiac-related readmission rates
- 21 percent lower readmission rates for bypass surgery and 32 percent lower for outpatient angioplasty based on 90-day cardiac-related readmission rates
- lower costs, 5 percent less for bypass procedures or 12 percent less for outpatient angioplasty with a 90-day episode of care

The HealthCore data is based on a claims analysis of 24 Blue Cross Blue Shield plans to measure outcome and cost for patients treated at BDC-designated facilities compared to other facilities where cardiac care is provided. The analysis includes 41,333 patients treated within a facility setting, 22,322 of which were treated at BDC-designated facilities and 19,011 at other facilities. The analysis is based on cardiac events and procedures occurring during calendar year 2006, with follow-up in 2007.

“Evidence-based performance measures are the cornerstone of quality improvement,” said Dr. Fred Edwards, Chair of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons’ (STS) Workforce on National Databases, an organization that has worked with BCBSA to develop the program selection criteria. “We are pleased to see that Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies are working closely with physician specialty organizations to develop objective measures of quality. The use of these measures in the Blue Distinction program is successfully encouraging medical facilities to raise the bar to provide patients with the best cardiac care.”

Other analyses show that Blue Distinction Centers for Transplants[®] also are demonstrating highly successful patient outcomes. The 1-year mortality rate for adult heart transplants is 11 percent in BDCs, compared to 19 percent at non-BDCs, according to an analysis of BCBSA RFI data and data from the Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients.

Because of the high level of success that BDCs have seen with regard to quality outcomes and value, Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies are in the process of building out the program to include additional cancer and transplant specialty areas, and branching into the areas of spine surgery and joint replacement.

“A very important component of improving the quality and cost of care that we provide in the United States is developing better evidence about the benefits and risks of alternative choices,” said Carolyn Clancy, director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). “One of the most effective methods of accomplishing this is through the use of collaborations and partnerships that have the capacity to bring enhancements developed on the local level to the attention of regional and national audiences.”

Employers nationwide recognize the value of the Blue Distinction designation as well. “Focusing on value is an important aspect of managing health care costs at U.S. Bank,” said Ed Caillier, Vice President for Benefit Design, US Bancorp. “The Blue Distinction program helps deliver that by ensuring highly experienced providers, reducing readmissions and complications, and ongoing quality management.”

Blue Distinction is a key element of BCBSA's "Pathway to Covering America: Ensuring Quality, Value, and Access," a plan of action for simultaneously improving healthcare for those who have access and expanding coverage to those who do not. Specifically, the Blue Distinction program supports the Pathway proposal both by changing incentives to promote better care and by empowering consumers and providers with information to help them make more informed healthcare decisions.

For more information about the Blue Distinction designation or to find a Blue Distinction Center in your area, please visit <http://www.bcbs.com/bluedistinction/>.

For more information about the Pathway to Covering America proposal, please visit <http://www.bcbs.com/issues/uninsured/background/the-pathway-to-covering.html>

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The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association is a national federation of 39 independent, community-based and locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies that collectively provide healthcare coverage for more than 102 million individuals – one-in-three Americans. For more information on the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association and its member companies, please visit www.BCBS.com.