



**BlueCross BlueShield
Association**

An Association of Independent
Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans

News Release

Blue Cross and Blue Shield
Association
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EMBARGOED FOR 12 PM EDT

June 8, 2006

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BCBSA Launches Blue Distinctionsm Program To Foster Consumer Engagement, Provider Collaboration Through Healthcare Transparency

CHICAGO – The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) today announced the launch of Blue Distinctionsm, a nationwide program that will create an unprecedented level of healthcare transparency with two goals: engaging consumers to enable more informed healthcare decisions and collaborating with providers to improve quality outcomes and affordability. Blue Distinction is an evolving program that will grow as the healthcare needs of consumers and providers change.

In collaboration with leading hospitals, physicians and medical specialty societies, Blue Distinction is transforming raw hospital and physician data into accessible, understandable and personalized information. Available to the Blues' more than 94 million members nationwide, Blue Distinction provides comprehensive healthcare quality and affordability information that is based on objective, consistent and common standards.

“Blue Distinction brings transparency to healthcare – similar to what consumers expect when purchasing most goods and services today. It is the cornerstone of our ongoing effort to create a more consumer-focused, knowledge-driven national healthcare system,” said Scott P. Serota, BCBSA president and CEO.

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“Blue Distinction also will bring together doctors and patients – encouraging stronger relationships than ever before and that leads to healthier lives and lower costs.”

Driven by quality, collaboration and affordability, Blue Distinction will strengthen consumer engagement and provider partnerships through transparency demonstrations that identify and compare medical costs; a nationwide hospital measurement and improvement program; and through new specialty centers offering the best practices and standards of care in bariatric surgery, cardiac care and transplant services.

Blue Distinction Transparency Demonstrations

Seventeen Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans are collaborating with local hospitals, physicians and medical groups in transparency demonstrations to identify and test the most effective ways to help consumers learn about the absolute and relative costs of medical services, including physician and hospital services. Blue Distinction demonstrations are underway in urban, suburban and rural markets coast-to-coast.

Blue Distinction Hospital Measurement and Improvement Programsm

The Blue Distinction Hospital Measurement and Improvement Program integrates metrics focusing on the appropriateness of care for common conditions such as heart attacks, heart failure and pneumonia. Collaborating with medical societies and provider associations, Blue Distinction measures are drawn from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Available to employers, the program covers nearly 90 percent of the Blue members in communities across the country.

Blue Distinction Centerssm

Blue Distinction Centers for bariatric surgery and cardiac care are in major markets nationwide, building on the Blue Distinction Centers for Transplants first established in 1991. Blue members have received nearly 8,000 organ and bone marrow transplants through approximately 67 existing centers nationwide.

“These centers show our commitment to working with doctors and hospitals in communities across the country, to identify leading institutions that meet clinically validated quality standards and deliver better outcomes in patient care,” said Allan Korn, M.D., BCBSA chief medical officer.

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The process used to select Blue Distinction Centers is based on clinical data from hospital registries. Each facility's structure, processes and care outcomes are rigorously evaluated. These criteria include nationally endorsed quality measures, developed in collaboration with medical experts and professional organizations.

"Blue Distinction puts a high value on research and evidenced-based health and medical information. New information is collected, organized, updated and presented in a useable and transparent way," added Dr. Korn.

The criteria for becoming a Blue Distinction Center for Bariatric Surgerysm include:

- Full-service, accredited inpatient hospital facility;
- Program must be performing bariatric surgery for the most recent 18-to 24-month period and must perform a required volume of bariatric surgical cases;
- Experience and credentialing of the bariatric surgical team;
- Ongoing quality management and improvement programs;
- Appropriate equipment and staffing; and
- Patient care and follow-up care including evaluation of bariatric surgery complication and mortality rates.

The criteria for becoming a Blue Distinction Center for Cardiac Caresm include:

- Full-service, accredited inpatient hospital facility;
- Program must be performing a required volume of percutaneous coronary interventions and coronary artery bypass graft surgeries and provide a full range of services including inpatient cardiac care and cardiac rehabilitation;
- Sub-specialty board certification of cardiac team;
- Ongoing quality management and improvement programs; and
- Cardiac care processes and outcomes for acute myocardial infarction, heart failure, percutaneous coronary interventions and coronary artery bypass graft surgery including evaluation of complication and mortality rates.

To learn more about Blue Distinction, go to bcbs.com/bluedistinction. On July 1, a national provider locator will become available enabling Blue members to locate participating bariatric surgery and cardiac care centers.

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Blue Distinction will be announced in a media conference call on June 8, 2006, at 12:00 PM EDT. To join the conference call dial: 225.383.8961. Participant code is: 688582.

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association is comprised of 38 independent, locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies that collectively provide healthcare coverage for more than 94 million – nearly one-in-three – Americans. For more information on the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association and its member companies, visit www.BCBS.com. For more information on Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association's policy positions and the healthcare debate, visit www.BCBSHealthIssues.com.

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