

Questions and Answers
Blue Distinction Media Launch
June 8, 2006

Q: What is Blue Distinctionsm?

A: Blue Distinctionsm, is 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 employers change.

Q: Why are you undertaking this program?

A: Blue Distinction responds to consumers and employers asking for more control over the management of their healthcare. They want transparency on cost and quality – similar to what they receive when they purchase most goods today – like cars or appliances.

Research by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association confirms that an overwhelming majority of people want the opportunity to access and use healthcare information. For instance, 88 percent of consumers said that if they were diagnosed with a medical condition, they would search for information about treatment options.

Q: What are the Blue Distinction Transparency Demonstrations?

A: 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.

Q: What is the Blue Distinction Hospital Measurement and Improvement Programsm?

A: 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.

Q: What are the Blue Distinction Centerssm?

A: New Blue Distinction Centers are now operational for bariatric surgery and cardiac care. The Blue Distinction Centers for specialty care identify quality providers of obesity (bariatric) surgery and cardiac care nationwide. Each center has been selected based on a rigorous evaluation of clinical data that provides insight into each facility's structure, processes and care outcomes. These nationally established criteria were developed with input from medical experts and organizations and support the consistent objective assessment of specialty care capabilities.

Q: How do Blue Distinction Centers compare with other specialty centers that are currently available in the marketplace?

A: Blue Distinction is the only program that offers a nationwide and comprehensive approach to specialty centers. Our centers must meet stringent and rigorous requirements based on objective clinical and quality data – not claims or administrative data.

Q: How did you identify and select your new centers?

A: Hospitals known to conduct bariatric surgery and cardiac care procedures were invited to apply to become part of the Blue Distinction specialty center network. The application process required hospitals to submit information relevant to specific criteria published by the American Society for Bariatric Surgery and the American College of Cardiologists. Input from expert physician panels, surgeons, behaviorists and nutritionists were also used in the development of criteria.

The centers were selected based on a rigorous evaluation of clinical data that provides insight into how the facilities are structured, the processes they use and the overall outcome of patient care.

Q: What are those criteria?

A: 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.

Q: Why were some facilities not designated as Blue Distinction centers?

A: There may be several reasons why a facility is not designated as a Blue Distinction center. They may not have applied, their application may not have been complete, or the requirements not met.

Q: Was cost a factor in figuring out the formula for the centers' designation?

A: No. The criteria used were based on clinical processes and outcomes.

Q: Will my insurance cover the surgery if I don't go to one of your centers?

A: You will need to check with your local Blue Cross Blue Shield Plan customer service representative about bariatric and cardiac care surgery benefits. They will be able to explain your coverage and let you know how your benefits apply.

Q: How do I find out more about Blue Distinction?

A: To learn more about Blue Distinction, go to bcbs.com/bluedistinction.

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