

The Value of Achieving a Blue Distinction Specialty Care Designation

The Blue Distinction® Specialty Care Program is a national designation program recognizing healthcare facilities that demonstrate expertise in delivering quality specialty care safely, effectively and cost-efficiently. The goal of the program is to help consumers find both quality and value for their specialty care needs, while providing a credible foundation for employers to design benefits tailored to meet their quality and cost objectives.

The Blue Distinction Specialty Care Program includes two levels of designation:

- **Blue Distinction Center:** Healthcare facilities recognized for their expertise in delivering specialty care.
- **Blue Distinction Center+:** Healthcare facilities recognized for their expertise and cost-efficiency in delivering specialty care.

Quality is key: only those facilities that first meet nationally established, objective quality measures for Blue Distinction Centers will be considered for designation as a Blue Distinction Center+.

The Blue Distinction Specialty Care Program currently designates facilities as Blue Distinction Centers in seven high-impact areas of care, including bariatric surgery, cardiac care, complex and rare cancers, knee and hip replacement, maternity care, spine surgery, and transplants. Blue Distinction Center+ designations are currently available for bariatric surgery, cardiac care, knee and hip replacement, maternity care, spine surgery and transplants.

The Value of a Designation

- **Differentiation in Your Community and Beyond**
Designation as a Blue Distinction Center or Blue Distinction Center+ differentiates your facility among peers in your local market as well as nationally. From your staff and referring physicians to patients and prospective employees, this highly respected designation affirms that your facility demonstrates expertise in delivering specialty care. Tools and resources to promote Blue Distinction Center and Blue Distinction Center+ designations are available through your local Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS) Plan.
- **Enhanced Awareness and Preference**
The BCBS System is committed to providing both consumers and physicians with increased transparency on provider quality and cost. When choosing a healthcare specialist, less than half of Americans have a high level of confidence that they could find quality information to aid in their decision.¹ Blue Distinction Center and Blue Distinction Center+ designations provide consumers and their referring physicians with the information they need to select a facility recognized for delivering quality, cost-efficient specialty care. According to research conducted on consumer healthcare decision-making, consumers are more likely to

¹ The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. (2014) Finding Quality Doctors: How Americans Evaluate Provider Quality. Retrieved from: <http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/finding-quality-doctors.aspx>

select a higher quality, lower cost provider than a high-cost provider when both quality and cost information are shown in tandem.²

Consumers and referring physicians can locate facilities designated as a Blue Distinction Center or Blue Distinction Center+ via easy-to-use online tools on bcbs.com, including the [National Doctor & Hospital FinderSM](#) and [Blue Distinction Center FinderSM](#). Designated facilities are also identified in local Plans' provider directories. Selection criteria for each program are posted on our public website at bcbs.com, so physicians can refer their patients with confidence.

- **Recognition Among Employers**

Employers are willing to adopt multiple tactics to help improve healthcare while managing cost, including offering richer benefits to increase use of designated facilities, narrowing networks to feature cost-effective providers, and offering incentives to change employee behavior. Each local BCBS Plan designs benefit differentials that meet employer's needs, and all BCBS Plans support those designs nationally.³ Market demand for benefit differentials is increasing, and many BCBS Plans already include benefit differentials for select programs based on the request of their employer accounts.

- **Benchmark Performance Against Peers**

The evaluation process for Blue Distinction Specialty Care is a win-win proposition. Whether or not it meets the program's selection criteria, every facility evaluated will receive a report providing useful and critical insights into your facility's performance. This report can provide a foundation for internal discussions with your executive management or medical staff to assess and improve your facility's quality and cost performance through comparisons to national benchmarks.

² Hibbard, JH., et al. (2012). An Experiment Shows That A Well-Designed Report On Costs And Quality Can Help Consumers Choose High-Value Health Care. *Health Affairs*, 31, no.3 (2012): 560-568.

³ The Blue Distinction program itself does not incorporate any benefit differentials. Benefit differentials are designed by the local Blue Plan.