
news release

January 28, 2010

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South Dakota hospitals designated as Blue Distinction Centers[®] for knee and hip replacement, spinal surgery

DES MOINES, IA (January 28, 2010) – Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield has designated two South Dakota hospitals as Blue Distinction Centers[®] for knee and hip replacement, and spinal surgery.

Blue Distinction Centers for Knee and Hip ReplacementSM and Blue Distinction Centers for Spine SurgerySM are part of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association's expansion of its Blue Distinction[®] designation. Hospitals receiving both designations include:

- Avera McKennan Hospital, Sioux Falls
- Sanford Medical Center, Sioux Falls

“Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield is committed to working with hospitals and physicians to ensure the highest quality care for our members,” says Paul Karazija, M.D., Wellmark's chief medical officer. “The Blue Distinction designation is designed to help our members choose hospitals with a proven track record for meeting aggressive quality standards.”

The selection criteria used to evaluate facilities were developed with input from a panel of expert physicians. To be designated as a Blue Distinction Center for Spine Surgery and/or a Blue Distinction Center for Knee and Hip Replacement, the following types of criteria were evaluated:

- Established acute care inpatient facility, including intensive care, emergency care, and a full range of patient support services with full accreditation by a CMS-deemed national accreditation organization
- Experience and training of program surgeons, including case volume
- Quality management programs, including surgical checklists as well as tracking and evaluation of clinical outcomes and process of care

- Multi-disciplinary clinical pathways and teams to coordinate and streamline care, including transitions of care
- Shared decision making and preoperative patient education

More information on selection criteria is available on www.bcbs.com.

The Blue Distinction designation is awarded by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association to medical facilities that have demonstrated expertise in delivering quality healthcare in the areas of bariatric surgery, cardiac care, complex and rare cancers, knee and hip replacement, spine surgery and transplants. The program is part of efforts by Blue plans to collaborate with physicians and medical facilities to improve the overall quality and safety of specialty care.

The additional Blue Distinction Centers for Spine Surgery and Blue Distinction Centers for Knee and Hip Replacement designations will bring the nation's number of Blue Distinction designations to more than 1,600—and this number is expected to increase in the coming years.

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Note: Designation as Blue Distinction Centers means these facilities' overall experience and aggregate data met objective criteria established in collaboration with expert clinicians' and leading professional organizations' recommendations. Individual outcomes may vary. To find out which services are covered under your policy at any facilities, please call your local Blue Cross and/or Blue Shield Plan.