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200 Belle Terre Road, Port Jefferson, NY 11777
(631) 474-6251 / (631) 476-5582 fax
Contact: Marilyn Fabbicante
Director, Public & External Affairs

ST. CHARLES AWARDED BLUE DISTINCTION® DESIGNATION BY EMPIRE BLUECROSS BLUESHIELD

Port Jefferson, NY (April 20, 2010) – Empire BlueCross BlueShield recently awarded St. Charles Hospital with a Blue Distinction® Designation for Knee and Hip Replacement. Blue Distinction for Knee and Hip Replacement is part of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association’s expansion of its Blue Distinction® designation.

"The Blue Distinction® Designation is a great honor for St. Charles," stated Jim O'Connor, executive vice president/chief administrative officer. "St. Charles performs more hip and knee replacement surgeries than any other hospital in Suffolk County. This designation is a reflection of our expertise in the area of joint replacement as well as our commitment to the highest quality of patient care and the best possible outcomes."

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 Knee and Hip Replacement, the following types of criteria were evaluated. More information on selection criteria is available on www.bcbs.com.

- 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

The Blue Distinction designation is awarded by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies 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 The Blues® efforts to collaborate with physicians and medical facilities to improve the overall quality and safety of specialty care.

The joint replacement program at St. Charles offers outstanding patient care from pre-surgical joint replacement classes to recovery and rehabilitation. Highly skilled orthopedic surgeons perform innovative and specialized services such as minimally invasive surgery to hip resurfacing to gender specific total knee replacements. In addition, technologically advanced surgeries include computer-navigated surgery, conservative muscle and bone-sparing techniques as well as pain management methods that result in faster recovery from joint replacement.

For more information about the total joint replacement program or the orthopedic program at St. Charles, please call (631) 474-6797.

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About Empire BlueCross BlueShield

Empire BlueCross BlueShield (Empire) is the trade name of Empire HealthChoice Assurance, Inc., and Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield HMO is the trade name of Empire HealthChoice HMO, Inc., independent licensees of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, serving residents and businesses in the 28 eastern and southeastern counties of New York State. Additional information about Empire is available at www.empireblue.com

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 facility, please call your local Blue Cross and/or Blue Shield Plan.
