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News Release

For Immediate Release

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National Honor for Excellus BlueCross BlueShield

The 2009 *BlueWorks*[®] Award for *Best Practices in Empowering Consumers and Providers* has been presented by the BlueCross BlueShield Association to Excellus BlueCross BlueShield in recognition of the health insurer's Community Conversations on Compassionate Care (CCCC) Program.

Community Conversations on Compassionate Care is a program developed by Excellus BlueCross BlueShield to help individuals over 18 years of age complete health care proxies and living wills. The judges noted, "The program is valuable not only because it is tackling one of the most important problems in healthcare today, but also because it is available (via the CompassionAndSupport.org web site) to the community beyond Excellus BCBS members."

CCCC sessions are held regularly across upstate New York at which healthy individuals learn the importance of advance care planning, conversations among loved ones and completion of health care proxies and living wills. These legal documents allow an individual to select a spokesperson, and an alternate, to make health care decisions should he/she be unable to communicate. In these documents, individuals can clearly state wishes and preferences for ongoing quality of life and end-of-life care.

"Without advance care planning, families and loved ones are left guessing an individual's wishes regarding medical care, life-sustaining treatments and if the resulting quality-of-life would be acceptable to the individual," said Dr. Patricia Bomba, Excellus BCBS vice president and medical director for geriatrics.

BlueWorks Awards highlight solutions that improve the quality and value of and access to the health care system. The Harvard Medical School Department of Health Care Policy and independent judges from key medical societies review BlueWorks submissions for their innovation, scope, approach and impact on health care delivery in Blue companies' local markets. By promoting evidence-based solutions to relevant challenges, the BlueWorks Awards are intended to benefit other BCBS companies and their local markets as well as the nation's health care system overall.

Community Conversations on Compassionate Care are an outgrowth of the Community-wide End-of-Life/Palliative Care Initiative that was launched in Rochester, New York in 2001 soon after the Institute of Medicine published its report, "Approaching Death, Improving Care at the End-of-

Life.” More than 150 professionals and consumers were engaged initially in the Rochester effort and countless more from across the region are now involved, including New York State’s Office for the Aging, Office of Family and Children Services and the New York Connects Program.

The Excellus BCBS initiative includes facilitated group discussions and presentations on advance directives led by trained lay and health professional staff; printed materials; videos; and a Web site (<http://www.CompassionAndSupport.org>). The core material combines storytelling with “Five Easy Steps” to promote conversations that help the participant complete a health care proxy and living will.

The “Five Easy Steps” are as follows:

1. Learn about Advance Directives
2. Remove Barriers
3. Motivate Yourself
4. Complete Your Health Care Proxy and Living Will
 - Have Conversations with Your Family and Health Care Provider
 - Choose the Right Health Care Agent
 - Discuss Your Values, Beliefs and What is Important to You
 - Understand Life-Sustaining Treatment
 - Share Copies of Your Completed Advance Directives
5. Review and Update

In New York, advance care planning documents include a health care proxy to designate a legal spokesperson and an alternate, a living will to spell out preferences for quality of life and end-of-life care and, for seriously ill individuals, the Medical Order for Life-Sustaining Treatment form (MOLST form) that’s signed by a New York State-licensed physician and communicates a patient’s wishes regarding life-sustaining treatments to all health care providers at all sites.

“Nationally, the completion rate for advance directives has not significantly increased since 1991, but our community conversations have had a dramatic impact here in upstate New York,” said Bomba. She leads the initiative for Excellus BCBS and is vice president and medical director/geriatrics for the health insurer.

Completion rates for advance directives have stagnated nationally at around 30 percent. Upstate New York surpasses that with completion rates of 35 percent in the Utica/Rome/North Country region, 40 percent in Central New York and 44 percent each in the Southern Tier and Western New York. The highest completion rate for advance directives, 47 percent, is in the Finger Lakes Region where the community conversations began in 2002.

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Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, a nonprofit independent licensee of the BlueCross BlueShield Association, is part of a family of companies that finances and delivers vital health care services to 1.8 million people across upstate New York. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield provides access to high-quality, affordable health coverage, including valuable health-related resources that our members use every day, such as cost-saving prescription drug discounts and wellness tracking tools in our Step Up program. To learn more, visit www.excellusbcbs.com