Sharps safety device contracting at Premier
guides the process by which it contracts, on behalf of member hospitals, for high quality healthcare products at prices conducive to overall cost management. Premier’s contracting decisions are grounded in a commitment to quality, reasonably priced products and services that improve the process and outcome of care while ensuring caregiver and patient safety.

Premier is also committed to promoting innovation in healthcare technology and supporting its members’ needs for the most technologically advanced products. This is achieved by contracting with suppliers that are leaders in their respective product areas and demonstrate a commitment to advancing technology and safety.

Premier encourages its business partners to develop advanced technologies and products that improve safety for inclusion in Premier’s purchasing portfolio. At the same time, Premier strives to ensure that existing agreements provide opportunities for new technologies from competing suppliers.

To that end, through its Technology Breakthroughs Program, Premier enters into new group purchasing agreements for products that it determines to be technologically superior and in the best interests of its member hospitals and their patients.
Premier’s sharps safety efforts

- In May 1999, Premier expanded its contracts for sharps safety devices through its signature Technology Breakthroughs Program.

- More than 900 frontline healthcare workers in 30 hospitals evaluated some 37,000 safety devices in Premier-led field evaluations.

- Between 1999 and the present day, these field evaluation findings have been used to guide contracting decisions and provide manufacturers with performance data to guide future product design.

- Recognizing the importance of clinician choice, Premier has contracts with more than 15 business partners that supply sharps safety devices.

- Also between 1999 and the present day, more than 2,800 clinicians, researchers, manufacturers, and hospitals have participated in Premier-sponsored educational programs on sharps safety.

- Premier’s free, publicly available electronic safety newsletter reaches more than 10,000 healthcare providers and companies.

- Through its Safety Institute, Premier hosts a public safety Web page that attracts more than 3,000 visitors each month.

Premier expands safety device offerings under breakthrough program

In May 1999, under its Technology Breakthroughs Program, Premier added three new safety syringes to its portfolio of safety products available to members. The manufacturers of these safety syringes and needle sheathing devices included New Medical Technology, Inc. (NMT); Retractable Technologies, Inc.; and Safety Medical Supply International, Inc. (SMSI). All three sharps safety devices offer a variety of features that reduce the potential for accidental needlesticks — including self-sheathing, shielding, and retractable needles.

These companies were awarded 18-month contracts with full access to the Premier membership, with administrative fees waived. Through its Technology Breakthroughs program, Premier evaluates new and emerging healthcare products from companies large and small. Of the 436 suppliers Premier currently contracts with, 176 are small businesses — many minority- and woman-owned.

Premier conducts field evaluations of safety syringes in member hospitals to guide contract decisions

Premier engaged member hospitals in field evaluations of the above-cited safety syringes, in addition to those available under an existing contract with Becton Dickinson. During the Technology Breakthroughs process, roughly 20,000 syringes were evaluated by nearly 300 frontline healthcare workers in Premier hospitals across the country. The purpose was two-fold — to identify key factors that contribute to safety technology innovation and frontline worker preference, and to share such critical information with participating device manufacturers to assist them in future design improvement.

Evaluation of the data also helped guide Premier’s decision, recommended by the Safety Institute, to award all three companies a two-year contract renewal in 2000. (Premier’s Safety Institute will publish the results of this comprehensive field study in a peer-reviewed scientific journal, making the data available to healthcare professionals, educators, researchers, and device manufacturers.) That spring, Premier hosted an industry forum on sharps safety, in which more than 300 healthcare professionals, educators, researchers, and device manufacturers participated and shared strategies for successful sharps injury prevention.

Premier expands phlebotomy device offerings and conducts field evaluations to guide contract decisions

In November 2000, also through its Technology Breakthroughs process, Premier expanded its safety device offerings to include phlebotomy (blood-drawing) devices. The four companies awarded 18-month purchasing contracts included SIMS Portex, Bio-Plexus, Inc., and Retractable Technologies, Inc. (whose agreement was signed by its marketing representative, Abbott Laboratories, Inc., at RTI’s request); SIMS Portex, Bio-Plexus, Inc., and
MPS Acacia. The new contracts offered full access to the Premier membership base, with administrative fees waived.

Field evaluations involving the phlebotomy devices of all five manufacturers were conducted in 25 Premier hospitals. In the end, more than 17,000 devices were evaluated by more than 600 frontline healthcare workers, and the results were shared with the contracting companies. Following these evaluations, the Safety Institute recommended that Premier award two-year contract renewals to all four companies.

**Sharps safety and injury prevention at Premier: A proven track record**

The November 2000 enactment of the Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act required medical facilities to provide healthcare professionals access to safety-equipped needles and phlebotomy devices (i.e., “sharps”). The new law, in the crafting of which Premier offered guidance and support, stands as a critical tool in the effort to protect caregivers from injury and bloodborne infections caused by needlesticks, such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

Rep. Cass Ballenger (R-NC), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections and chief sponsor of the legislation, praised Premier for its effort. “Premier was extremely helpful in enabling my office to gain a better understanding of the issues involved, and in pushing for enactment of these protections,” he said. “A partnership with Premier is a valuable asset in the effort to bring safer medical devices to the workplace.”

Premier continues to advocate the implementation of uniform, national standards in this area — believing that they are essential for the elimination of such preventable occupational hazards in our nation’s healthcare settings. At the same time, America’s mainly private healthcare institutions bear the primary responsibility for making the health system safer for patients and workers. Premier — through its Safety Institute, contract offerings, and other clinical improvement vehicles — is dedicated to helping not-for-profit member hospitals and health systems better meet such challenges.

**The Safety Institute: A “premier” player on the patient safety front**

In the healthcare safety arena, the Safety Institute is Premier’s resource-coordinating arm. It is the medium...
through which Premier and its members work to enhance their leadership on a wide range of safety issues — needlesticks being just one. Established in 1999, the Safety Institute has aided in the identification and evaluation of safety-engineered devices and medical equipment, and has helped member hospitals train staff in their use. Having grown significantly in size and scope over the last three years, the Safety Institute develops safety tools and resources, provides clinical and technical safety information and consulting for hospitals, and offers opportunities for networking and collaboration.

Long before the 2000 sharps legislation was conceived, and with even greater determination since its passage, Premier has worked to encourage safe device use, and to help healthcare institutions and professionals integrate new technologies to realize better outcomes. Its intent and practice go far beyond assisting members in achieving full compliance with the law. Premier, in fact, endeavors to enhance clinical performance and the quality of patient care as well.

**Understanding the realities of safety on the frontlines of care**

Healthcare practitioners know that the introduction (and ultimate integration) of safety-engineered sharps is a massive technological, logistical, and educational undertaking. A successful transition to these, or any new class of devices, is fraught with obstacles.

The commitment of time and resources to properly evaluate sharps injury prevention devices is one such challenge. It is critical that frontline health workers be involved in product evaluation, as the new law stipulates. Because some clinical departments have special needs and often require very specific device types, multiple evaluations of an array of devices may be necessary. Then, too, the introduction of any new device, either before or concurrent with the replacement of existing devices, must be accompanied by education and staff training. Ongoing reinforcement of clinical guidelines is often required to remedy a dynamic in which individual caregivers may reach for the more familiar, conventional (though no longer appropriate in all applications) device rather than a newer one that is safety-equipped.

Yet another challenge for needlestick prevention is the reality that the introduction of safety devices, by itself, does not and cannot eliminate sharps injuries altogether. Numerous studies have shown that while devices with sharps injury prevention features do in fact reduce the frequency of needlesticks, the elimination of such injuries remains elusive. While the safety features are themselves subject to some degree of failure, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also attribute needlestick injuries to users intentionally bypassing or failing to activate the safety feature. To be sure, devices with safety features would be most effective in reducing needlestick injuries when used in tandem with a comprehensive prevention program.

These realities underscore the importance of understanding the many factors that influence the selection and implementation of safety-equipped sharps devices and injury prevention programs. Premier understands these realities, and has translated such insight into strategies to help member hospitals and health systems overcome these and other obstacles. These strategies include:

- **Extensive evaluation of new products to determine which offer the most effective combination of safety, practitioner ease-of-use, and quality patient care.** This includes encouraging hospitals to fully engage frontline workers in the evaluation and eventual selection of all marketplace products.

- **Supply chain management to ensure that new devices are purchased at reasonable prices — enabling the institutions themselves to control costs — and integrated as seamlessly as possible into clinical practice.**

- **Education and training for physicians, nurses, and technicians in the critical benefits of proper device use and disposal for themselves and their patients.**
In short, success requires effort beyond compliance with the law to ensure that healthcare institutions and professionals “buy into” the changes and support them wholeheartedly. Because Premier is a performance-improvement organization, it has the capacity and capability to help member and affiliated institutions achieve positive change. Premier provides supply chain management and group purchasing of supplies and equipment for more than one-third of the nation’s hospitals. It also provides an array of clinical and administrative performance initiatives as well as clinical technology and practice support services that help member systems benchmark and improve patient care and delivery.

**Translating understanding into strategy**

As its strong, consistent response to sharps injury prevention illustrates, Premier is a longtime leader in the arena of healthcare worker safety. In addition to advising the framers of the Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act on specific strategies to reduce healthcare workers’ exposure, Premier was instrumental in gaining the support of its 1,600 affiliated institutions. In fact, long before Congress took up the issue, Premier was helping hospitals enhance the safety of their own frontline professionals by introducing them to improved medical products, including safety syringes, through its Technology Breakthroughs Program. As early as mid-1999, Premier was supplying its members with five different safety syringes, and has since expanded this effort to include a variety of phlebotomy devices. Premier believes it is critical for healthcare professionals to have access to these and other proven safety devices; its field evaluations of new and emerging safety products continue unabated to this day. At present, Premier has contracts for sharps safety devices with 15 companies.

Premier does not simply evaluate safety products and list them in a catalog for affiliates to purchase. It endeavors to contract for a broad range of products at the best possible prices, and to help its hospitals achieve successful supply chain and care setting integration. This, of course, is a massive undertaking for even one large metropolitan hospital treating many thousands of patients each year.

Once the Needlestick Safety and Prevention Act became law, Premier began working with hospital staffs to help them achieve compliance. The Safety Institute provided tool kits with sample training programs and instructions for implementation, and sponsored well-attended conferences on sharps safety. Premier’s tool kits for member hospitals — including training videos and sample collection tools and injury logs — were designed to help infection control and safety officers implement needlestick safety practices that would best serve their frontline workers. This enabled Premier member hospitals to be ahead of the game when, in January 2001, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued revisions to its Bloodborne Pathogens Standard. Premier continues to offer sharps injury prevention resources and tools through its Safety Institute Web page.

To date, Premier has helped hundreds of institutions embrace the new safety standards, and has worked to provide the resources and implementation tools necessary for full compliance. Its mission, however, compels Premier to go much, much further. Premier is committed to making patient and healthcare worker safety — along with care quality and cost management — essential performance measurements for all its member not-for-profit hospital and health systems.

**About Premier**

Premier, Inc., is one of the nation’s leading strategic alliances of hospitals and healthcare systems across the country, representing more than 200 owners, the 900 hospitals and healthcare facilities they operate, and approximately 900 other affiliated hospital and healthcare organizations. Premier maintains major offices in Charlotte, NC; Chicago, IL; San Diego, CA; and Washington, DC.

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