

Tips for Selecting Medical Sharps Devices

Exposures to bloodborne pathogens via injuries from used needles and other sharp medical devices have prompted healthcare providers to seek safer devices and have been a driving force for federal and state legislation mandating the use of sharps with integrated safety features. Manufacturers periodically refine their product and introduce new ones; no doubt you continue to explore new devices and applications. A few considerations up front can make your life easier and safer in the long run. What are some points to consider?

Evaluate and select products systematically:

1. Keep your eyes open for new products.
2. Ask for samples. A hands-on look at the products is essential.
3. If samples look promising, do a clinical evaluation with members of your team who routinely use the products. Use a check list or other evaluation tool to make sure you don't forget important features during the evaluation. (Check out the evaluation tools developed by the Training for Development of Innovative Control Technologies project (TDICT), available online at <http://www.TDICT.org> under "evaluation tools")
4. Look closely at employee evaluation and feedback. This will help rule out inferior devices or, from criticism and questions raised, will identify key points to communicate when you introduce a new device. Communicate with the manufacturers' representatives – share both positive and negative feedback so they understand how their products perform in real-world situations.
5. Go online to look for review of products you are evaluating. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) maintains a database called MAUDE (Manufacturer and User Facility Device Experience) that contains user reports about medical devices that may have malfunctioned or caused a serious injury or death. The database is easily found with a web search for "FDA MAUDE database" or accessing the link:

<http://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfmaude/search.cfm>

By selecting "Go to Simple Search" you can enter search terms (such as the product name or "needlestick") to see if other clinicians or facilities have reported problems with a particular device.

Use manufacturers' representatives for training. A criterion for selecting a product should be that the manufacturer trains staff at your facilities, during staff members' normal shifts (especially if you have off-shift staff). Encourage staff members to question and offer constructive criticism to the manufacturer's rep. The representative is a direct link back to the design engineers and this is one way products get refined and improved.

Provide feedback on sharps products so that other can benefit from your experiences.

1. Talk to colleagues inside and outside your organization and compare notes about the benefits and shortcomings of the sharps medical devices you use.
2. Provide feedback to the manufacturer. Typically, this feedback might be through a manufacturer's representative but you can also call the manufacturer directly and ask to talk to a technical representative. Communicate any injuries or near-injuries and let manufacturers know their product designs need to better protect users.
3. If you purchase your sharps devices through a group purchasing organization or another purchasing consortium, let your representatives know what characteristics are important in the devices offered. They have leverage with manufacturers and suppliers because their office is where money changes hands, so ask them to communicate your experience to drive the refinement and availability of more protective, user-friendly sharps devices. If necessary, keep pushing them to offer the devices you prefer.
4. Report any sharps injury or near-injury (near-miss) to the FDA MAUDE database. This is an effective way to share your experience with others. Also see our fact sheet *How to Complain About Medical Products and Get Heard* for more information on this topic.

The Safe Home Care and Hospitals Program is a research group within the University of Massachusetts Lowell, Department of Work Environment. Please send comments and questions to: SafeHomeCare@uml.edu. For more information, visit our website: www.uml.edu/SafeHC