

Improving the Health of Communities

An Interview with Susan DeVore, Chief Executive Officer, Premier, Inc.

EDITORS' NOTE Susan DeVore is the CEO of Premier Inc. DeVore's tenure with Premier has centered on driving innovation in healthcare and leading the industry through profound change by engaging stakeholders to co-develop solutions that support high-quality, efficient and sustainable care delivery models. She is an industry-leading thinker who has been named multiple times to Modern Healthcare's 100 Most Influential People (listed 6th in 2020) and Top 25 Women in Healthcare lists. She received the Charlotte Business



Susan DeVore

Journal's 2018 Women in Business Lifetime Achievement Award, was named to Becker's Hospital Review's 2017 100 Great Healthcare Leaders to Know and was recognized as a 2016 UNC Charlotte Distinguished Alumnus. DeVore is a member of the Board of Directors and the Audit Committee and Risk and Finance Committee of Unum Group, a NYSE-listed company. She is a non-voting member of the audit and finance committees of the Board of Directors of AdventHealth. DeVore is also a member of the Board of Directors or member of nonprofit and state-based organizations, including the Healthcare Leadership Council, the Coalition to Protect America's Healthcare, the Institute of Medicine Roundtable on Value and Science Driven Healthcare, and the UNC Charlotte Board of Trustees. Under DeVore's leadership, Premier has been named as one of the World's Most Ethical Companies for the past 11 years, received the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and earned the Best in KLAS title for Overall Healthcare Management Consulting. DeVore obtained a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and a master of management degree from McGill University.

COMPANY BRIEF Premier Inc. (premierinc.com) is a leading healthcare improvement company, uniting an alliance of more than 4,100 U.S. hospitals and health systems and approximately 200,000 other providers and organizations to transform healthcare. With integrated data and analytics, collaboratives, supply chain solutions, and consulting and other services, Premier enables better care and outcomes at a lower cost. Premier plays a critical role in the rapidly evolving healthcare industry, collaborating with members to co-develop long-term innovations that reinvent and improve the way care is delivered to patients nationwide. Headquartered in Charlotte, Premier is passionate about transforming American healthcare.

Will you highlight the history and heritage of Premier and discuss how the business has evolved?

Premier is a healthcare improvement company that unites an alliance of more than 4,100 hospitals and health systems and approximately 200,000 other providers and organizations (e.g., nursing homes, imaging centers, clinics and the like) to transform healthcare. Premier enables better care and outcomes at lower costs by leveraging integrated data and analytics, supply chain solutions, consulting services and

improvement collaboratives.

Premier was privately-held for much of its history and our customers – we call them members – owned the majority of the equity in the company. We had our initial public offering in October 2013, which brought great value to both our members and our company. At the same time, our mission to improve the health of communities has not changed. We pride ourselves on the fact that nearly 90 percent of our members think of us as a strategic partner or extension of their organization, and that our net promoter score is more than 70 percent.

Our business has evolved over the years in the sense that we have found ourselves in possession of a tremendous amount of intelligence that can help inform how various issues are approached across the healthcare spectrum. The COVID-19 pandemic has further illustrated our approach of bringing various data points to bear when we are tasked

with helping healthcare organizations – be they biotechnology organizations to large integrated delivery networks – solve the challenges they face.

How do you describe the Premier culture and how critical is culture to the success of the company?

Premier is a mission-driven organization and our mission is quite simple: to improve the health of communities. Outside of my office is a big sign that says, “care is a verb.” To work at Premier you have to care about affecting the company's mission because, by virtue of our footprint, we live in the communities we serve.

We have four core values that guide our decision-making across the board:

1. Integrity: integrity of the individual, the enterprise and the alliance.
2. Passion for performance: a passion for performance and a bias for action, creating real value for all stakeholders and leading the pace.
3. Innovation: seeking breakthrough opportunities, taking risks and initiating meaningful change.
4. Focus on people: demonstrating respect for all, and mutual commitment to the success of the alliance, our employees, our business partners and the communities we serve.

We are successful because all of our colleagues are willing to go above and beyond for our members – the hospitals, nursing homes and urgent care centers that they and their families use – every day. Without that willingness to serve, our ability to deliver value would be vastly diminished.

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How has Premier adapted its business to address the pandemic and how proud are you to see the way Premier’s workforce has showed strength and resilience during this unprecedented time?

Proud would be an understatement. Premier activated its Disaster Response Team on January 23, 2020, three weeks before the first COVID-19 patient was identified in the United States. Early activation provided Premier and our membership an edge in anticipating the explosion of global demand for critical personal protective equipment (e.g., N95 masks, isolation gowns, gloves, etc.). Our Disaster Preparedness and Response Community continues to serve as an “always-on” touchpoint, keeping members updated on the latest developments and serving as a peer resource group to share best practices.

Throughout the pandemic, we’ve set aside competitive boundaries and leveraged our relationships at every level of the supply chain to address challenges as they occur to enable access to supplies, intelligence and technology. One of the ways this manifested itself was through the role we took leading the COVID-19 Private Sector Supply Chain Coalition that engaged regularly with the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) and the White House Supply Chain Task Force. Our teams have innovated solutions, enhanced technology and created partnerships that have helped the caregivers working tirelessly in places like hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities and doctors’ offices. I am proud to say that our efforts are helping to stabilize the supply chain, provide an early warning of COVID-19 hotspots, bridge the public and private sectors, shape the public’s understanding and promote industry-wide problem-solving.

Furthermore, while our teams have historically been spread across the country, working from home was a new experience for many of our colleagues. I was so proud of how all of our colleagues were able to adapt when their worlds were turned upside down as offices and schools closed and routines changed. Our

members experienced minimal disruptions and we all approached our work with added purpose, meaning, empathy and understanding. It’s also important not to forget that so many members of our team work inside of hospitals and health systems. Where appropriate, those teammates continue to show up – in person – every day.

Will you discuss Premier’s focus on building a diverse and inclusive workforce?

Over the summer, we reaffirmed our commitment to creating a corporate culture, albeit remote, that is inclusive and safe for everyone. This manifested in the decision to recognize Juneteenth as a corporate holiday for all employees in 2020 and going forward.

Our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging strategy is based on foundational pillars designed to accelerate how we provide health and wellness solutions to an increasingly diverse world. We have hired a new Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion to oversee this strategy. Our employee-based Council on Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging acts as our governing committee to define, drive and support our strategic objectives.

We are committed to a workforce representing different generations, ethnicities, genders, races, orientations, cultures and life experiences. Our values – specifically integrity and focus on people – speak to our commitment to treat others fairly, equitably and consistently while affirming that respect for our differences creates our strength. Building a diverse and inclusive culture where our workforce can thrive, where all voices matter and everyone has a chance to succeed is an extension of these values.

Will you highlight Premier’s commitment to corporate responsibility?

We take pride in being known as a company that is governed responsibly and behaves in an ethical manner. To that end, we are extremely proud of being named one of the World’s Most Ethical Companies for 13 consecutive years (and counting) by the Ethisphere Institute for ethical leadership.

Diverse suppliers help our hospitals create jobs and improve life in the communities they serve – this is something that we all recognize. As much as we are proud of our past record of success due in large part to our members’ commitment to inclusiveness, we are equally focused on ensuring that our future continues that heritage. To that end, we have enhanced our current supplier diversity program with Sourcing Education and Enrichment for Diverse and Small Suppliers (SEEDS), a program aimed at increasing the number of small, diverse and regional enterprises doing business with members of the Premier healthcare alliance. The SEEDS program lends support to diverse and small business enterprises, enabling them to grow at a pace that is commensurate with their existing business infrastructure, be it local, regional or national. Moreover, the program provides contracted suppliers with experienced resources and educational tools. These tools are intended to assist our suppliers in gaining contract sales with our members and building long-term relationships across the Premier healthcare alliance.

Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

Women are the Chief Medical Officers of their families, making most decisions about health plans, providers and treatment, however, they are underrepresented in healthcare leadership. But that’s changing. In so many ways, women leaders are just like men. We are driven, we build high-performing teams, we execute strategy, we deliver results.

Historically, women may have struggled with work/life balance, but that’s the benefit of a career in healthcare. Many of us have experienced the healthcare system in this country through the lives of our children, our grandchildren and our aging parents. That motivates us to bring our A-Game to work – because making a better healthcare system is being a good mom. It is being a good spouse, a good daughter.

As leaders, there are always walls, but if you drive toward a career that rewards you personally, speaks to your core values and allows you to make a better world for those you love, you don’t have to be hemmed in by those walls.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers during this challenging and unprecedented time?

There is a quote that I love from W.E.B. Du Bois: “The most important thing to remember is this: to be ready at any moment to give up what you are for what you might become.” What that means to me is to think about everything as an opportunity because there will always be barriers.

Second, it’s easy to be pigeon-holed or typecast in your career. If you’re a successful operator, it’s hard for people to think of you as a successful strategist. People will put you in boxes of what they think you’re capable of, and you have to defy those expectations if you want to move ahead.

Last, I had three young kids and opportunities in my career, and the balance wasn’t always easy to strike. But you have to remember – you only get one life, so make the most of it. ●