

2015 Study: Electronic health record strategies and impact on patient outcomes

In 2015, Vizient member organizations raised a new question in the ongoing exploration of top performance: **Do electronic health record (EHR) strategies influence an organization's ability to achieve superior patient outcomes?**

To investigate, Vizient conducted interviews with **ten academic medical centers**—five ranked as top performers and five as mid performers in that year's **Quality and Accountability ranking**. The objective was to identify whether specific EHR strategies correlated with high performance and contributed to clinical excellence.

Importantly, the study found that **simply having an EHR—or a particular vendor solution—was not a differentiating factor** in performance. Instead, it was how the EHR was **prioritized, standardized, and integrated** into clinical workflows that made the difference.

Key findings

1. Structured prioritization of EHR optimization

Top-performing organizations had a clear, strategic process in place to prioritize EHR enhancements. Rather than reacting to ad hoc requests, they evaluated and sequenced improvements based on impact and alignment with clinical goals.

2. Standardization over customization

High performers emphasized standardized forms, decision support rules, and order sets, avoiding excessive customization. This approach enhanced consistency, usability, and alignment across departments.

3. Clinician engagement in EHR strategy

A notable distinction among top performers was intentional engagement of physicians and clinical teams. These organizations built formal structures to involve clinicians in developing and reviewing decision support tools, order sets, and EHR-related improvements.

Conclusion

The 2015 study reinforced a key theme from earlier research: **technology is a tool, not a solution**. The presence of an EHR alone does not drive performance; rather, it is the **strategic use, thoughtful design, and clinician involvement** that unlock its potential to improve patient care.

Ultimately, high-performing academic medical centers **optimize technology in service of clinical excellence**, supporting shared accountability, standardization, and goal alignment—principles first highlighted in the foundational 2005 study.

Learn more about Vizient's work around [top performance](#).