

# 2018 Study: Chief Quality Officer role

In response to growing interest in how executive roles support organizational performance, Vizient conducted a 2018 study to examine the **contemporary role of the Chief Quality Officer (CQO)** and its connection to top performance in academic medical centers (AMCs).

**CQOs from 31 AMCs participated** in the survey. While the study concluded that the CQO role itself is **not a direct driver of top performance**, it provided valuable insights into how the role is structured, its strategic influence, and the skills required for effectiveness.

## Key findings

### 1. Blended CMO-CQO roles are common, but differentiation remains important

- 66% of responding AMCs combined the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and CQO roles, yet organizations still recognized the need for dedicated oversight of quality operations. Blending the roles can blur essential responsibilities, potentially weakening focus on quality.

### 2. Strategic influence and direct reporting lines

- Over 60% of CQOs report to the CEO or CMO, and most have budgetary control for the quality department.
- CQOs are engaged in strategic planning and play a central role in defining organizational quality priorities.
- Many CQOs use Vizient's Quality and Accountability scorecard to guide improvement initiatives and set annual performance goals.

### 3. Core responsibilities and reporting functions

The CQO role typically oversees functions such as:

- Patient safety
- Clinical and operational process improvement
- Infection control
- Data and analytics
- Accreditation and regulatory compliance

### 4. Essential CQO skill set

Top-performing CQOs possess a broad and multidisciplinary skill set, including:

- Strong communication and analytical capabilities
- Systems thinking and high-reliability knowledge
- Expertise in metrics, measurement, and outcomes
- Ability to engage clinicians, educate executives, and demonstrate ROI on quality initiatives
- Strategic capability to scale system-wide improvements

## Conclusion

Although the CQO role is not in itself a standalone driver of top performance, it serves as a **critical enabler** of key organizational behaviors that do lead to high performance. Effective CQOs help **cascade clear goals, empower front-line leaders, and align quality initiatives** with patient-centered care.

The role's strategic value lies not in its title, but in its capacity to **bridge clinical excellence and operational execution**, ensuring that quality remains a central focus across all levels of the organization.

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