

2005 Study: Key characteristics of top performers in healthcare rankings

In 2005, Vizient conducted its inaugural **Quality and Accountability Ranking** to assess academic medical centers (AMCs) across six domains: **safety, mortality, effectiveness, efficiency, patient-centeredness, and equity** using Clinical Data Base® insights. In response to interest from ranked institutions seeking to improve, Vizient launched this study to understand what differentiates **top-performing AMCs** from their **mid-tier peers**—a more relevant comparison than the lowest-performing group for most member organizations.

Key findings

The study identified **five critical characteristics** shared by top-ranked AMCs:

1. **Shared sense of purpose**
Leaders and staff at all levels are unified around patient care as the core mission. A culture of continuous improvement and service excellence is deeply embedded.
2. **Leadership style**
CEOs are visibly passionate about quality and safety. They lead authentically, connecting daily operations to the broader mission through storytelling, aligned governance, and collaborative goal-setting with clinical leaders.
3. **Accountability systems**
While goal-setting is centralized, execution is decentralized. Department chairs own their performance, with clear metrics and empowered front-line teams to drive quality and safety improvements.
4. **Focus on results**
Continuous performance improvement is rooted in redesigning systems and processes, not in over-relying on technology. Success is measured against external benchmarks.
5. **Culture of collaboration**
Strong, respectful relationships exist across all roles—administrators, physicians, nurses, and staff. Every team member is recognized as a contributor to problem-solving and improvement.

Conclusion

Top-performing AMCs build a **coalition-minded leadership team**, grounded in a **culture of collaboration, accountability, and patient-centeredness**. In contrast, lower-ranked organizations often struggle with **diffuse priorities, lack of leadership support, and limited coaching for staff**—barriers that hinder sustained improvement.

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