

## CASE STUDY

UC San Diego Health



# Designation Turned Differentiator

UC San Diego Health pursues distinction as a **high reliability organization**, streamlining clinical operations and improving organizational communication.

UC San Diego Health has always prided itself on its dedication to safety and quality, but with two major expansion projects in 2017, it decided to take a deeper look. “We knew our growth involved new challenges and we knew there is always room for improvement,” said Dr. Christopher Longhurst, M.D., chief information officer and associate chief medical officer for quality and safety. By 2018, however, UC San Diego Health had recommitted to becoming a high reliability organization.

## Refocusing on the High Reliability Journey

As defined by The Joint Commission, a high reliability organization holds zero harm as its ultimate measure. The organization constantly and consistently works toward that goal through commitment from leadership, an organizational culture where all team members can speak up, and the use of improvement tools such as Lean.

“We said we’re going to pick a goal as an organization that we can focus on that gets us all centered on the right priorities relative to quality,” said Chad VanDenBerg, chief quality and patient safety officer. VanDenBerg and Longhurst have spearheaded the organization’s high reliability mission in tandem.

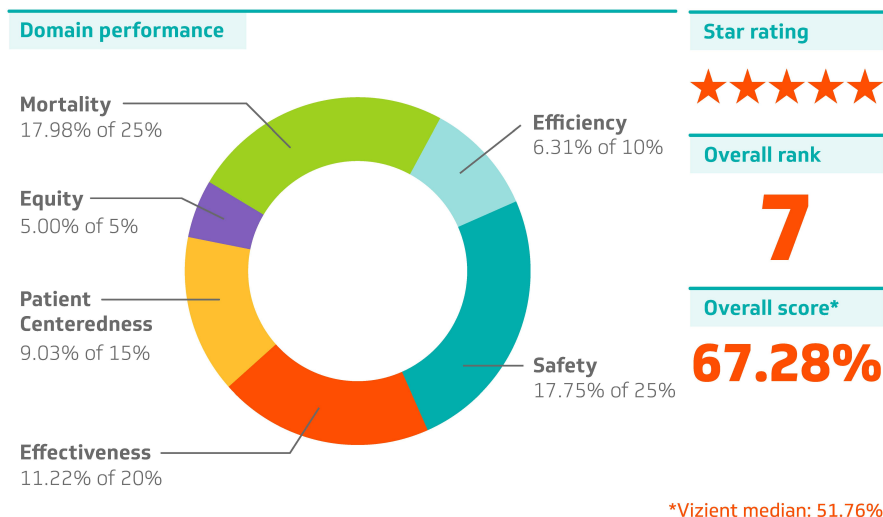


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## UC San Diego Health System Scorecard



## Leading on Every Level

It wasn't just the guidance of VanDenBerg and Longhurst that was critical to the process. The duo embraced their partnership with COO Brendan Kremer and CCO Margarita Baggett, and the leadership of UC San Diego Health CEO Patty Maysent. Maysent has steadfastly championed the organization's high reliability goals, which is key to being able to put the right structures in place and make appropriate investments, according to VanDenBerg and Longhurst.

That leadership filtered down and was motivated at every level by a desire to improve patient care and patient outcomes. "It is a year-to-year commitment to be able to evidence the exceptional care that our frontline faculty and staff provide," VanDenBerg said, adding that the team-based approach is central to UC San Diego Health's success.

## Leaning on Analytics

With zero harm as UC San Diego Health's "North Star," the organization began its journey to high reliability by understanding current performance and

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**Chad VanDenBerg**  
Chief Quality and Patient Safety Officer,  
UC San Diego Health



setting long-term goals. A crucial part is to understand how the hospital was performing, and for that, the organization uses the Vizient® Q&A dashboard as a mile marker for success. The enterprise goal is to achieve top 10 performance, and that goal is cascaded to every level of the organization.

At the outset of UC San Diego Health's high reliability journey, the team studied the Vizient methodology and generated internal dashboards with targets based on the Vizient Clinical Data Base (CDB) comparative performance—first top 10 and then top 5. The UC San Diego Health analytics teams, led by Eema Hemmen, also used CDB data to create performance prediction models to track progress ahead of quarterly updates. And working with Vizient team, UC San Diego Health developed an understanding of the metrics and their drivers, data quality issues, and improvement opportunities. "Vizient's dashboards are very helpful in identifying opportunities and helping our administrative and medical leaders prioritize resource allocation," said Longhurst.

Because the internal dashboards leverage an enterprise tool, the data is available and transparent to all leadership, including medical directors, administrative leaders and others. Everyone is encouraged to log in, deep dive on the data, and create their own set of assumptions and improvement opportunities at the local level.

## Process-Focused Outcomes

Another crucial aspect of UC San Diego Health's high reliability efforts was a partnership with the transformational healthcare team under the leadership of COO Brendan Kremer to leverage Lean improvement processes. "One of the key elements for us was figuring out how to create 10,000 problem-solvers, all helping drive performance improvement at every level," said VanDenBerg.



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—Christopher Longhurst, M.D., Chief Information Officer and Associate Chief Medical Officer for Quality and Safety, UC San Diego Health

Key to that process is the tiered daily huddle. At every level, from the frontline staff to the executive team, each day begins with a huddle where they intentionally ask: Are we prepared to safely care for our patients today? Are there any concerns—infrastructure, staffing, supplies, equipment—around safety? Concerns are communicated to the proper resources and addressed as quickly as possible so they can deliver safe, exceptional care to patients that day and every day. Each daily huddle ends with expressing gratitude to members in the huddle.

### High Reliability Journey Enabled Agile, Rapid Pandemic Response

In less than three years, UC San Diego Health has progressed significantly on its high reliability journey. They've cultivated and continuously support a culture of gratitude at every level of the organization. Members remain committed to the goal of zero harm. In the first two years of their journey, they reduced harm by nearly 26%.

In 2020, UC San Diego Health was ranked #1 for the San Diego region in U.S. News & World Report's "Best Hospitals" report. In 2019, UC San Diego Health received Vizient's Bernard A.

Birnbaum, MD, Quality Leadership Award. (Vizient didn't have quality performance rankings for 2020 due to the pandemic.) And when the pandemic struck, the processes UC San Diego Health had in place helped set them up to continue to deliver safe and high-quality care to both their COVID and non-COVID patients.

"We think of this as a journey, not a destination. There are a lot of mile markers along the way," VanDenBerg said.

### Systemwide Collaboration

The challenge for UC San Diego Health now is sustaining progress, which includes both sharing and learning best practices with others, including the four other academic medical centers in the University of California system.

"I think that any time health care organizations come together in a friendly competition to deliver the highest quality care, that's great for all of our patients," Longhurst said.



### Celebrating Teamwork and Success

Marking milestones is a tenet of UC San Diego Health's high reliability journey. Each year at the Vizient Connections Education Summit, the team celebrates its ranking with its peers: sixth in 2019 and a top performer in the AMC cohort again in 2020, when rankings were not publicly issued due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The celebration and teamwork are integral to maintaining momentum toward the system's high reliability goals—and staff motivation for delivering outstanding patient care. Vizient and UC San Diego Health also co-hosted a celebration to honor the contributions bedside care staff made to the ranking.



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