

CASE STUDY

Novant Health

Enhancing systemwide quality control

Novant Health standardized safety and quality control rankings across its medical system



When it comes to being remarkable, Novant Health has created a standard that enables it to remain competitive in the ever-changing healthcare market. An integrated network of physician practices, hospitals and outpatient centers, Novant Health serves patients across Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina with more than 6 million physician clinic visits in 2021.

In 2018, the organization aimed to improve the company culture under a unified safety and quality standard, but it lacked a high-level perspective of where these opportunities lived. Only three weeks on the job, David Priest, MD, MPH, senior vice president and chief safety and quality officer, saw that leaders at each medical center had to go to multiple sources for their population health, financial and safety and quality data, all of which are needed to better understand patient outcomes, determine current rankings in safety and quality, and identify areas of improvement. Priest also determined that redundancies existed across databases. He saw a need to unify Novant Health's data from those disparate data silos and make it available under one dashboard.

Getting a closer look at the data

With systemwide alignment on a data strategy, Novant Health turned to Vizient and its Clinical Data Base (CDB) to be the data engine that would bring transparency and clarity to the current performance of its 15 medical centers.

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The first step was to clean up and merge every data point, so leadership only had one source of truth for successful adoption. “If we were going to take advantage of this great new tool, we had to have a broader data management strategy happening at the same time,” says Priest. “You shouldn’t have to go to different data groups to get your information. It ought to be in one place.”

The CDB helped Novant Health create a hub for all of its historical data and analyze its current performance in real time with no redundancies. Novant Health was also able to create custom reports and dashboards and use the Vizient Quality & Accountability (Q&A) scorecard for planning and improvement.

Comparing clinical benchmarks against peers

As with any large health organization, systemwide standardization of onboarding,



operations and quality control is essential to improving patient outcomes, staff performance and overall experiences. At the time, however, the organization lacked a way to compare industry-wide successes in real time. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) data for industry comparison is often delayed by years, and it’s hard to set a standard without real-time information.

After looking over the CDB benchmarking data, Vizient and Novant Health leadership met at a one-day summit to discuss strategic goals before broader implementation across facilities. Novant Health leaders examined the data to learn the advantages of the CDB and create actionable items for their own facilities.



●● It’s been a long three years, and despite that, Vizient and its tools have helped us get to a better place. ●●

David Priest, MD, MPH

Senior Vice President and Chief Safety and Quality Officer, Novant Health

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“We didn’t know if our improvement was enough,” says Suzie Rakyta, vice president of clinical excellence at Novant Health. “What really enticed us about the CDB was that we could see this data and we could compare ourselves against our peers in real time to see, are our improvements fast enough? And what are our opportunities? We had some ‘aha’ moments as we really got into the CDB.”

The peer-to-peer comparisons led to discovering room for improvement in patient mortality and hypoglycemic events. Novant Health stepped back to review current protocols, create necessary documentation and reach out to peers to learn more about how they were excelling in certain areas.

Pushing local ownership of goals

The organization’s first area of data visualization focused on patient mortality. By drilling down to a patient-level view, Novant Health was able to identify opportunities for improvement. They then worked to get their facility leadership and staff focused on the data and how to begin changing old habits. With more than 35,000 team members across its medical centers, for example, standardization in hand-hygiene monitoring, patient safety indicators and other factors can go a long way.

Priest shares that implementation and adoption weren’t instantaneous. However, visualizing the data was vital to get buy-in from all staff across Novant Health medical facilities.

Communication is key

Kati Everett, SVP, chief communications officer, credits the partnership between Novant Health’s leadership with its internal communication team for the ongoing success of their data-driven performance improvement. “Safety is the No. 1 visual cue that we have had in all of our internal assets over the past three years in comparison to everything else we’ve done,” she explains. “We write about it in all of our internal communication channels, reminding folks when to report and who to go to with questions.”

This commitment to communication and standardization of processes particularly streamlined onboarding for Novant Health’s traveling nurses, a practice that increased exponentially with the pandemic. In 2020, the travel nursing sector across all healthcare grew 35% from 2019, with 2021 seeing an additional increase of 40% growth.



With a temporary workforce, fast onboarding into processes is essential to maintaining quality control and efficiency within the staff and providing an excellent experience for patients.

“Having a North Star of data helped keep people on task when things were happening outside of our control. You have to be willing to live with the idea that it’s never going to end and there are going to be issues. You just hope that culturally you can get everybody pulling the rope in the same direction most of the time and that your patients will benefit,” says Priest.

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The Vizient Q&A scorecard was key to measuring each medical facility's clinical performance year over year when compared to other similar medical centers. This ranking comparison helped identify gaps and best practices, and the tool's quarterly calculator helped track ongoing progress.

Novant Health's clinical data team took on this data and made it their own by creating leading indicators and a month-to-month visual analysis.

"The leading indicators were really a pulse check for us," says Rakyta. "Are we headed in the right direction mid-month, or do we need to tweak something if we haven't seen any type of movement?"

Priest shares that now, when he goes to executive meetings, he hears the hospital leaders talking about readmissions and how they saw this data in the CDB. While it took a while for them to adopt the data, now they're using it day-to-day to make informed decisions.

Every week, a clinical support executive team meeting looks at different issues to remove barriers in data analysis and other challenges. These meetings with local leadership bring transparency into the facilities' goals and help create ownership of outcomes and accountability of improvements and mistakes to complete visualizations. Each facility sets its priorities on the data and company-wide issues.

Novant Health facilities also work with system teams to prioritize systemwide problems areas, such as sepsis, length of stay and congestive heart failure.

"Even though we're part of a system, it has to be owned at the local level," says Rakyta. "Once those leaders are involved, we have that structure put in so that data flows to and from that local leadership team. That's where that accountability sets in."

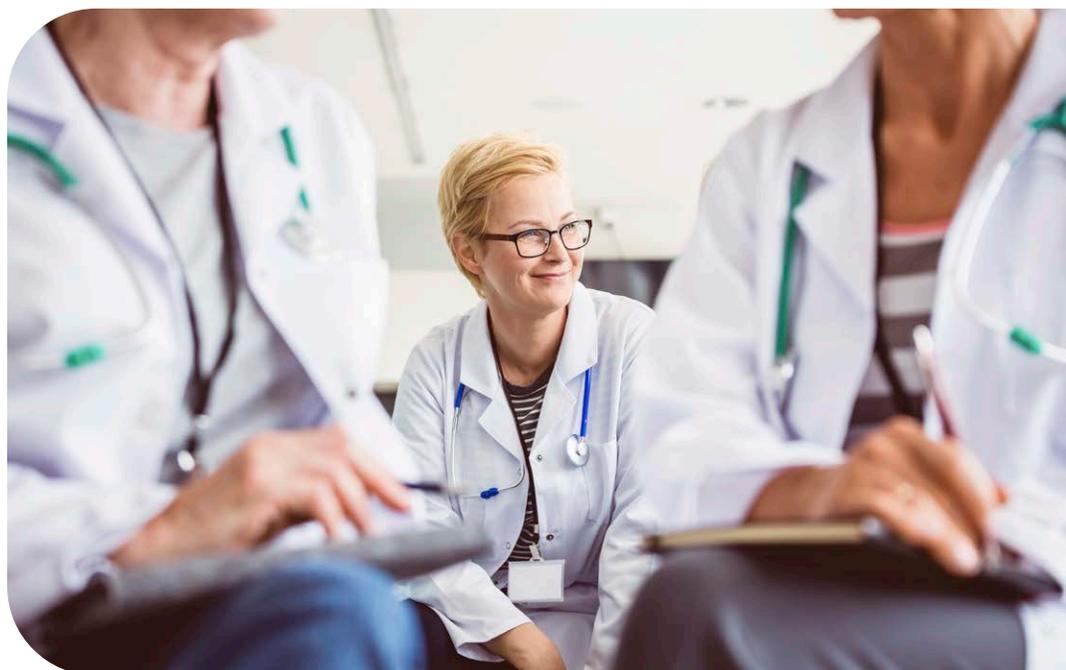
Most of Novant Health's medical centers now have top Leapfrog rankings due to the data-driven integration into strategic goals and weekly meetings as a company.

Looking to the future

Novant Health is taking what it has learned so far and applying those improved processes to the integration of its newest acquisition, New Hanover Regional Medical Center. In fact, the visualization data work done by the clinical data team was one of the main things that attracted New Hanover Regional Medical Center to Novant Health.

In late 2021, Leapfrog Group assigned straight A's to all 15 Novant Health medical centers after having only nine with top scores the year before. Novant Health plans to continue on its current path of enhancing processes to that ultimately improve patient outcomes, first its current focus on the areas of mortality and hypoglycemic events.

"It's been a long three years, and despite that, Vizient and its tools have helped us get to a better place," Priest says. ■



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