

4.12 Setting up a virtual ward service at University Hospital Limerick to serve the community catchment area of Mid-West Community Healthcare

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Background: A virtual ward (VW) service facilitates patients to receive hospital level care, monitoring and treatment in the comfort of their own homes, monitored 24/7 in a central hub in an acute hospital. A VW was established at University Hospital Limerick (UHL) in July 2024 for respiratory and cardiology patient cohorts initially. **Methods:** Implementation involved:

1. View VW Model: NHS Norfolk & Norwich Hospital visit August 2023.
2. Digital Solution: Part of National Procurement Evaluation Group for technical solution.
3. Second Pilot Site: St. Vincent's University Hospital joined December 2023.
4. Infrastructure & Equipment: Establishment and equipping of virtual hub in UHL.
5. Staffing and Training: 14 nursing staff and one administrative post, supported by pre-existing respiratory consultant, ANP/CNS and eHealth digital support. VW curriculum development, training and education of staff.
6. Patient selection: National and local documents to support COPD & Bronchiectasis patient cohorts in initial roll out.

Results: VW “go-live” since July 2024 to decrease in-hospital bed stays/admission avoidance, and enhancing patient outcomes/experiences. **Conclusion:** UHL is one of two pilot sites in the Irish Healthcare system to implement this innovative model of hospital level care, with clear objectives including pathway expansion, workforce retention strategies, and sharing proof of concept of the innovative work undertaken.

Key Words: Respiratory, Digital Health, Technology and Transformation eHealth, Virtual Wards

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