
POSTER ABSTRACT

Co-design of a capability framework for nurses working in a virtual ward in acute care.

International Conference on Integrated Care (ICIC26), Birmingham, 13-15 April 2026

Freda Browne¹, Carmel Davies¹, Stamatia Kontonika¹, Ann Flynn², Paul Gallagher³, John Gilmore¹, Anne Jones³, Joan Killen², Cariosa Murray³, Jonathan Drennan¹

1: University College Dublin, Ireland

2: St Vincent's University Hospital, Ireland

3: HSE Dublin and South East, Ireland

Background: Based on a national model, the first virtual wards (VW) for acute care were established in Ireland in July 2024. Enabled by remote monitoring technology, the VW provides temporary hospital-level care to people in their homes with acute or worsening chronic conditions. However, the virtual ward is a radically new way of working for nurses, and international literature is lacking on the capabilities required to support nurses in this area. This presentation will describe the development of a capability framework for nurses working in acute care virtual wards and inform implementation planning for further VW development.

Approach: This research study was conducted as a collaborative project between academic researchers and practice partners. Multiple methods of data collection were utilised to identify key capabilities. Data was collected iteratively depending on the stage of the research and the development of the capability framework. Document analysis of national and local standard operating procedures, related policies and documents took place.

Observation of nursing work in the virtual ward was undertaken, as were focus groups and individual interviews with virtual ward staff and local and national key stakeholders. Following the analysis of data, a series of co-design workshops were facilitated with virtual ward staff to develop the final capability framework.

Results: A co-designed capabilities framework has been developed, which identifies six domains for capability. Within each domain, the knowledge, skills, personal attributes, and experience that enable a nurse to perform safely and effectively in the virtual ward have been detailed. The next phase of this work will involve the dissemination of the capability framework and the potential application of the framework at a national level.

Implications: Involving VW nursing staff in the co-design of the capability framework has ensured the production of an authentic and relevant framework, which is grounded in practice. Nurses with the right expertise are essential members of the healthcare workforce in the delivery of safe and efficient virtual care.

The capability framework will support the implementation of the virtual ward at a national and international level and can be used as a framework to support the recruitment, education, and preparation of nurses to work in the virtual ward.