

# The Virtual Revolution: Measuring the Impact of Virtual Wards



INSIGHTS

## INTRODUCTION

Picture this: You're receiving top-quality healthcare, all from the comfort of your own home. It's not a distant dream; it's the reality of virtual wards, and the UK is leading the charge!

A recent health foundation survey shows that a whopping 78% of Britons are keen to monitor their health at home. NHS staff are supportive of the idea, with a solid 63% in favour.

Intriguingly, 71% of the UK public are open to being treated through a virtual ward, and support is especially high among disabled people and those with a carer. Yet, there's a segment of society who are not as convinced. As we embrace this exciting change, it's essential to ask: **Just how effective are virtual wards?**

In this article, we explore the impact of virtual healthcare, understanding its effectiveness, patient satisfaction, and healthcare costs.

With a minority still unsure, and varying opinions across different social groups, it's time to understand what this innovation truly means for healthcare in the UK and beyond.



**The NHS England** has treated a staggering 100,000 patients in virtual wards over the last year, with 16,000 of those in January 2023. The numbers are soaring, with more than 340 virtual ward programmes now operating across England alone and a total of 7,653 virtual beds available. That's a remarkable 60% increase in availability since May 2022.

**Virtual wards** have emerged as a promising healthcare solution in recent years, offering a way to provide effective care to patients outside of a traditional hospital setting. With the increasing adoption of virtual wards, it is crucial to evaluate their impact on patient outcomes, satisfaction, and healthcare costs.

These wards can be defined as remote care facilities that bring together various healthcare professionals to provide coordinated and targeted care for patients in their own homes. Through the utilisation of telemedicine, remote monitoring devices, and digital communication tools, virtual wards allow healthcare teams to monitor patients, administer interventions, and offer support without the need for direct face-to-face contact.

The popularity of virtual wards has been growing as healthcare providers recognise the potential benefits they offer. By shifting care from hospitals to home, virtual wards can help alleviate the burden on healthcare facilities, reduce rehospitalisation, and enhance patient outcomes. However, to fully understand their effectiveness, rigorous research is needed.

One of the key aims of virtual wards is to better patient outcomes through quick, timely interventions and ongoing monitoring.

A range of studies, including one by [NHS England](#), have shown promising results. Patients in virtual wards were found to have a notably lower chance of ending up in hospital compared to those getting the usual care. Thanks to constant remote check-ups and fast action when needed, these virtual settings are great at spotting health issues before they get worse, helping to avoid hospital stays.

That said, it's not all plain sailing. There are challenges to consider when it comes to making virtual wards work as well as they should. Reliable technology and effective training for healthcare staff are must-haves for these wards to truly make a difference in patient outcomes.

### **Patient Satisfaction**

Patient satisfaction is central to delivering first class healthcare. Virtual wards are showing real promise in boosting how happy patients are with their care. They offer the kind of perks that make a difference: convenience, better communication, and care that's tailored to the individual.

The response from patients who have experienced virtual ward care is overwhelmingly positive. The comfort of receiving care at home, without the hassle of travelling or staying in a hospital, is a real win for many. It's no surprise that this leads to higher levels of satisfaction.

A study by [Acacium Group in 2022](#) found that people in virtual wards were more satisfied than those in traditional care settings. The easy access to care and the personal touch from virtual ward teams were big factors in this positive feedback.

## IMPACT OF VIRTUAL WARDS ON HEALTHCARE COSTS

Virtual wards aren't just good for your health; they're good for your wallet and the NHS budget too. A **study showed** that the switch to phone calls instead of home visits saved an incredible £522 per patient. Add to that a saving of £220 on bed days, and you're looking at a total saving of £742 per patient compared to traditional rapid response care. That's not just pocket change; it's a game-changer!

But the financial perks don't stop there. Another study found that virtual wards cut down on costly hospital stays and emergency visits. Plus, the use of remote monitoring and telemedicine means fewer travel expenses and less need for extra staff, making the whole system more cost-effective.

And here's the cherry on top: imagine the global impact if we rolled out virtual wards worldwide. We're talking about a healthcare revolution that could save countries a fortune, making quality care more accessible for everyone.

Virtual wards are doing a good job so far, helping patients and saving money. But there's more work to do to make them even better.

However, we need to understand the impact of virtual wards over the long term. This will provide clarity on whether they are sustainable solution or if there are any issues will need resolving.



## HOW TO IMPLEMENT VIRTUAL WARDS

Implementing virtual wards involves a combination of technology, healthcare professionals, and patient engagement.

**Identify the right patients.** Virtual wards are not suitable for everyone. It's important to identify the types of patients who can safely and effectively receive care at home. This may include patients with chronic conditions, such as heart failure or COPD, or patients who are recovering from surgery.

**Develop clinical pathways.** Virtual ward care should be based on clear clinical pathways. These pathways should outline the specific care and support that patients will receive, as well as the criteria for admission and discharge.

**Invest in technology.** Virtual wards rely on technology to connect patients with clinicians and other healthcare providers. This may include video conferencing, remote monitoring devices, and electronic health records (EHRs).

**Train staff.** All staff involved in the delivery of virtual ward care need to be properly trained. This includes training on the use of technology, as well as training on the specific clinical pathways that will be used.

**Develop referral and discharge processes.** Clear processes need to be in place for referring patients to virtual wards and discharging them when they are ready to return to their usual care setting.

**Implement quality assurance measures.** It's important to implement quality assurance measures to ensure that virtual ward care is safe and effective. This may include tracking patient outcomes and conducting regular audits

## HOW CAN VWS BENEFIT HEALTHCARE INSTITUTIONS GLOBALLY?

These wards can offer a number of benefits for healthcare institutes in all countries.

**Reducing costs:** Healthcare institutions can save on operational costs by reducing the number of inpatient beds needed. Virtual wards can help optimise bed utilisation, leading to potential cost savings and increased operational efficiency.

**Patient Engagement:** Patients can become more engaged in their healthcare when they have access to virtual ward services. They can actively participate in their care, track their progress, and communicate with healthcare providers, leading to better adherence to treatment plans and improved health outcomes.

**Increased access to care:** Virtual wards can extend access to healthcare services for patients in underserved or remote areas. Patients who may have limited access to healthcare facilities can receive quality care through remote monitoring and consultations.

**Improved Efficiency:** By streamlining the care process and leveraging technology, virtual wards can improve healthcare institutions' operational efficiency. Data from remote monitoring can be integrated into electronic health records, making it easier for healthcare providers to access and analyse patient information.

**Scalability:** Virtual ward programmes can be scaled up or down as needed, making them adaptable to changing patient populations and healthcare demands.

**Pandemic Preparedness:** Virtual wards proved especially valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic by reducing the burden on hospitals and minimising the risk of virus transmission. They can be a key component of healthcare institutions' pandemic preparedness plans.

Here are some of the ways virtual wards are being used in different countries:

In the United Kingdom, the [NHS is using virtual wards](#) to care for patients with a range of conditions, including heart failure, COPD, and diabetes.

In the United States, many [hospitals are using virtual wards](#) to care for patients who are recovering from surgery.

In the Middle East, countries such as the [United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are investing in virtual wards](#) to improve access to care for their citizens.

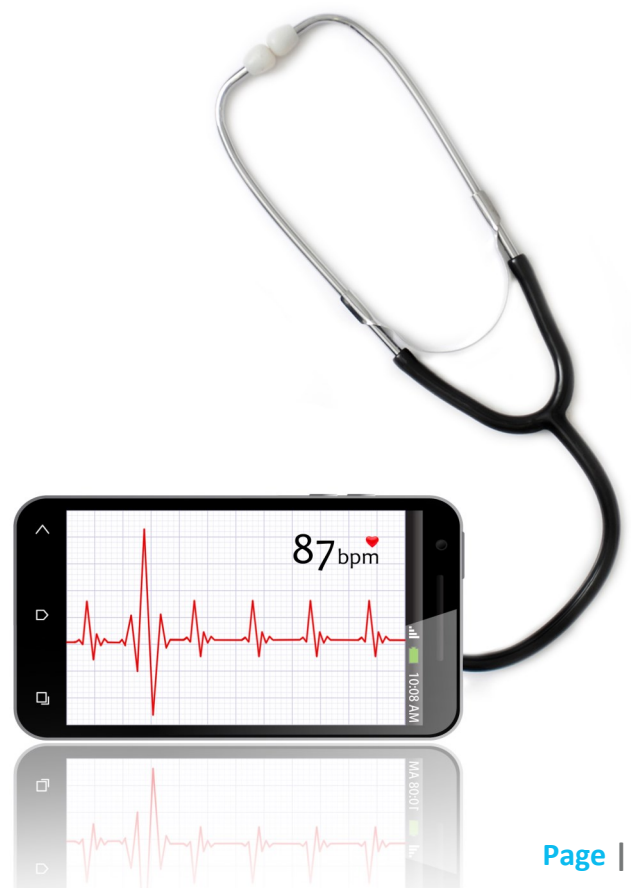
## CONCLUSION

The emergence of virtual wards in healthcare represents a virtual revolution in patient care. Through the use of telemedicine and remote monitoring, virtual wards offer a promising solution to enhance patient outcomes, increase satisfaction, and reduce healthcare costs.

While the current body of research demonstrates positive results, further studies are necessary to validate and optimise the implementation of virtual ward programmes. Additionally, healthcare professionals should consider virtual wards as a valuable tool in providing comprehensive and patient-centred care.

At Linea, we have a team of experts in healthcare improvement. Contact us to see how virtual wards could work for your organisation as part of an integrated community healthcare system. You may well be surprised by the speed of implementation, benefits realisation, and return on investment.

**Together, we can create a healthier future for all.**







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