



Norfolk and Suffolk Health and Care Awards 2026

Research and Innovation Award

Kathryn Mares and Helen Hall

James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and University of East Anglia

Kathryn has led an innovative partnership with digital health company NeuroVirt to advance the use of technology in stroke rehabilitation. This collaboration brings together clinicians, researchers, stroke survivors and industry partners to co-design digital interventions and clinical trials. NeuroVirt's virtual reality software supports arm movement recovery by encouraging stroke survivors to engage in therapeutic exercises in an interactive, motivating environment, improving rehabilitation outcomes.

This work has resulted in the first regional implementation trial of a digital rehabilitation product, using implementation science to better understand how such technologies can be embedded into NHS practice. The multi-site trial spans eight Trusts, including Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and East of England Community Health and Care Trust, involving over 40 clinical staff and around 100 patient participants. It also creates opportunities for Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) to lead research, with Principal Investigators at each site drawn from AHP professions.

Delivered within just 18 months, the project required navigating complex ethical, governance and operational challenges. Kathryn and Helen Hall (JPUH) demonstrated exceptional collaboration, developing standard operating procedures and ensuring safe, scalable implementation across sites. The trial has fostered a strong community of practice, supporting shared learning and innovation.

The impact has been significant. Stroke survivors have gained access to advanced rehabilitation tools, supporting increased exercise and potential improvements in recovery. The project has generated income for participating Trusts, built research capability in new sites, and strengthened collaboration across acute and community settings. With early adopters integrating NeuroVirt into routine care, this work provides a scalable model for embedding digital innovation in the NHS, improving patient outcomes, workforce development and service delivery.