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## The suit that makes you feel old

**A suit that simulates old age is helping architects design more user-friendly hospitals.**

The Third Age Suit restricts the mobility of the wearer to give them an appreciation of what it is like for patients getting around the hospital.



The suit gives the wearer an insight into how the patient feels

Architects from Capita Symonds are using the suit to help them redesign the Derby City General Hospital.

The suit was developed by scientists at Loughborough University and adapted by the building firm Skanska.

It was first designed in conjunction with Ford, which used it to test the design of the Ford Focus car for healthy elderly people.

### Restricted movement

Skanska and the Trust have modified this to have an insight into the problems that patients with reduced mobility might have in hospitals.

This reduced mobility could be due to clinical conditions like arthritis and multiple sclerosis or recovering from surgery or an accident and can affect young as well as old people.

The suit has splints and restrictors that limit the movement of joints such as the hand, wrists, elbows, neck, upper and lower torso, knees and ankles to simulate the loss of mobility caused by ageing and arthritis.

Yellow goggles mimic the declining vision, increased sensitivity to glare and reduced sensitivity to blue light experienced by many people as they age.

**“ To actually understand what it's like to be without mobility you have to take it away. ”**

A spokeswoman from Help the Aged

Surgical style gloves are also provided to mimic the reduction in tactile sensitivity that occurs as a result of changes in the skin and sensory receptors.

The architects found the simplest of tasks, such as sitting down, standing up and reaching out the arm became laboured and difficult when wearing the suit.

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They identified getting through doors, accessing patient wardrobes and reaching towels as potential problems and have already reviewed their proposed designs for the hospital.

Howard Jeffrey, design manager for Skanska, said: "It was fantastic how immediate the discussion was. As soon as they had put the suit on they recognised what was not going to work in their design and changed it.

"As a contractor, we can now change the designs at no extra cost."

He said nurses and people in the hospitals could also get an insight into what patients experience by wearing the suit.



Brian Ibell from Derby Hospitals NHS Trust said: "With the increasing ageing population we need to understand more about mobility problems encountered by patients and how we can design more appropriate facilities.

"This piece of research is a step forward for designers working on any hospital scheme and will certainly benefit Derby Hospitals."

A spokeswoman from Help the Aged said: "It's a fantastic idea.

"To really experience say visual or hearing loss you have got to take away that sense. It's that same type of theory here.

"To actually understand what it's like to be without mobility you have to take it away.

"The awareness both for practitioners and everybody of how difficult it can be to live with reduced mobility is real progress.

She said although the majority of us will suffer some loss of mobility as we get older there are ways to prevent it, such as exercise and good nutrition.

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