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Media Release

‘Ageing suit’ helps staff deliver compassionate care at the RUH

A specially designed ‘ageing suit’ is helping staff at the RUH understand what it’s like to live with dementia.

The neurological symptoms associated with dementia – forgetfulness, confusion, a sense of frustration – are commonly known, but the physical challenges dementia sufferers face are often less widely understood. Impairments in coordination, strength, dexterity, and visual ability can make the world a difficult and sometimes frightening place for dementia sufferers to navigate.

A special ‘ageing suit’, created by health solutions specialists Hill-Rom Liko, was developed to give wearers an opportunity to experience the physical impact of dementia. Mary Chapman, Manual Handling Advisor at the RUH, was so impressed by the suit that she decided to create one for use in training at the hospital.

The suit consists of a padded and weighted upper-body protector, weighted leggings, thick gloves, and goggles. For the wearer, the suit mimics extra weight, increased heaviness of limbs, alters the centre of gravity and mobility, and changes walking gait. The gloves and goggles alter perception.

When Mary Chapman first wore the suit she gained first-hand experience in how dementia can affect movement and dexterity: “When I wore all this gear, it was difficult to walk up and down steps or even just sit on a chair. The gloves made it difficult to grip, to hold a knife and fork, a cup of tea, or pick pills out of a pot. My spatial awareness was altered and that made me realize just how important it is when carrying out personal care to let the patient know what we are doing. We need to think about what the dementia patient understands and how they interpret what we are doing and saying to them.”

Dr Chris Dyer, Consultant Geriatrician and Clinical Lead for Dementia Care, said: “This suit, along with all the work going on at the RUH, supports our ambition to be the best provider of acute hospital care in England for people with dementia. In the last year alone we have recruited new dementia coordinators, a seven day mental health liaison service, and opened a brand new state of the art dementia friendly ward environment.”

National Dementia Awareness Week runs from Sunday 18 to Saturday 24 May, with a series of events and training initiatives taking place at the hospital throughout the week.

Ends



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