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Wear your health on your sleeve – Northumbria students granted £10,000 for wearable technology designs

Design students from Northumbria University, Newcastle, have been awarded generous grants to develop their wearable technology designs - which could create significant savings for the NHS.

As part of the postgraduate Wear Care project, groups of postgraduate design students were tasked with creating product propositions for a patient-centered device for health monitoring or treatment. The aim of the project was to look at how technologies such as these could benefit the NHS by

providing the patient with greater control and therefore reducing costs.

The finished proposals were judged by a panel of industry experts from some of Northumbria's leading business partners. The panel included Dr Séamus O'Neill, CEO of The Academic Health Science Network North East and North Cumbria (AHSN NENC); Dr Jon Helliwell, Director of Printable Electronics at the Centre for Process Innovation; Richard Kirk, CEO of PolyPhotonix Ltd., and Duncan Hill, Senior Scientist, also from PolyPhotonix.

They were joined on the panel by Dr. Stuart English, Programme Leader for MA Design, who set up the project. He said "Northumbria Design has a long history of developing impactful collaboration with industry. The WearCare project is supported by a team of industrial collaborators; CPI is a world leader in printable electronics, the AHSN supports innovation throughout the NHS and PolyPhotonix Ltd is a bio-photonic research company that has developed a light based therapy sleep mask that will save the NHS in excess of £1 billion a year.

"We are delighted to be working with these internationally renowned organisations to create new patient-centred wearable healthcare applications that empower people to manage their conditions and stay well."

Academic Health Science Network (AHSN North) invested £10,000 to the project to help fund the design prototypes or further research. The winning team received £5000 of this grant for their design - a device which could provide music therapy for autistic children and also help to focus their attention.

Dhruvin Giasotta is an MA Design Management student from Mumbai, India, who was on the winning team.

"The Wear Care project was a great learning experience," he said, "Practical projects like this are so important because they help you understand how companies work in real-time scenarios and what is expected from you as a designer.

"The feedback from the panel was particularly valuable and the £5000 from AHSN will be used to develop product prototyping of our design."

The team that secured second place were granted £3000 to further research their device which aims to reduce back injury, specifically targeted at NHS staff. Finally, £2000 was given to the team in third place for their smart-watch based app, which uses video game technology to treat depression.

Dr. Seamus O'Neill, CEO of AHSN, explained "Disruptive innovation is most common when expertise from different disciplines is brought together so we were delighted to be part of this design programme with Northumbria University. The offer from Northumbria to take part in a programme that focused its design expertise on the issue of wearable health technology was one that I was not going to pass up.

"It has been a joy to see the enthusiasm and creativity that the students have brought to the process. We were keen to ensure that the ideas developed were not lost once the programme ended and to ensure this we are sponsoring a prize that will allow the winners to take forward the development of their creations."

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