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Adorning Health

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This paper describes research being undertaken that aims, firstly, to investigate the role of co-design in the design of wearable medical devices, (specifically orthoses for upper limbs); and, secondly, to explore how contemporary jewellery design practice could influence such design. At present, upper limb orthoses (splints and supports) are designed and prescribed by orthotists, hand therapists, and occupational therapists with only the biology and pathology being taken into consideration. People wearing these devices can often feel stigmatised by wearing them. This leads to poor patient adherence, and can also impact on their psychological and social wellbeing.

The research intends to investigate whether involving the wearers of medical devices and wearers of contemporary jewellery in the design process could offer insights into how future devices could be designed that take into account the supra-functional needs of their wearers. Furthermore it is hoped that a new methodology is developed for wearable medical devices, through the use of both contemporary jewellery design and co-design methods and philosophies, thereby developing a new hybrid artefact: the people-centric health device.

The generative design research project (delivered within an Action Research framework) aims to recruit six participants, who have Hypermobility Syndrome, (a chronic connective tissue disorder, causing joint dislocations and chronic pain), and six contemporary jewellery wearers; and intends to recruit via social networking sites and informal social meetings. Through the use of social media; sensitising packs, group workshops and virtual meeting spaces,

data is then generated which will be used to inform and inspire future design work.

Analysis of the Data generated from the research outlined here will draw upon established methods such as the DIKW scheme and thematic analysis. Prototypes and finished artefacts are expected to be fabricated through CAD/AM tools.

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