

'SMART GLASSES' OFFER HELP TO NEAR-BLIND PEOPLE



The smart glasses provide simple images of nearby people and objects

Transcript of an interview with Dr Stephen Hicks and colleagues from the Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences, and trial participants

Stephen Hicks: We've been working on a project over the last couple of years, funded by the Department of Health, to build a pair of glasses that can make use of the remaining sight that registered blind people have. It has a camera and a display; the camera picks up the three-dimensionality of objects nearby, and it can turn that into a bright, easy-to-see display and put that on to the inside of a pair of glasses.

Iain Cairns, trial participant: [looking at Stephen Hicks] So let's have a look. I can see your face, your camera.

I felt rather like, you know, Geordi La Forge off Star Trek, or one of the X-Men. It was like a sudden extra layer of vision coming down over what I was seeing.

Lyn Oliver, trial participant: They really are an aid. It's not 'seeing' as you would call it, but it just enhances and gives you that little bit of extra confidence. It takes a little layer of stress off.

Iain Cairns: For a few years now I've started to use a cane; it's more to sort of warn other people than to tap my way.

Lyn Oliver, trial participant: If they're using a long cane on the floor, it only picks that up. And it can go the wrong side of a pole and you end up saying 'hello' to the pole. It'll pick that up. After taking them off I was missing them – I was saying, 'Oh, I'd have seen that.'

Iain Cairns: This is giving me more of a context about, you know, I'm here, in a corridor, with a handful of people. I was wondering who those lovely ladies in the background were, but I think they're mannequins.

Stephen Hicks: Every six months or so we have a new version. It's like, wow, have we pushed it too far? But we can't keep up. Every time we bring out a new one there are people saying amazing things.

Joram van Rheede, Postdoctoral researcher, Nuffield Department of Clinical Neurosciences: One participant

told us, 'Oh, we've been in touch [with the department] for about one and a half years.' This is someone who had tried various prototypes, and she said, 'Now you've actually turned into people; you used to be smudges.' There are people who actually see their guide dog moving around for the first time. I'm trying to be a sceptical scientist guy, and I'm trying to collect hard evidence, but more and more, as we test more people, it really becomes apparent that there are quite a lot of people that we can help in a significant way.

Lyn Oliver: I'm pleased to be able to do it, and it's interesting; it gives me interest. They're such a great bunch of guys.