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First year Medicine students will experiment ageing

A compulsory exercise makes aspiring doctors experience for themselves the limits which old people suffer by putting themselves in their patient's situation. The pilot scheme was used on a course on the 17th Summer University

Starting from the next course first year medical students will feel for themselves what it means to grow old. The subject Information and documentation Resources, included as a compulsory exercise, according to Jaume March, professor in the Department of Surgery of the UdL and coordinator of the course of the Summer University "Consciousness towards ageing through the ageing game".

The students registered on this course were the first to personally "suffer" the limitations in sight, hearing and mobility which elderly people normally suffer. With glasses to simulate cataracts, ear plugs to simulate deafness, bound up to feign respiratory problems and short- windedness or gloves to emulate the consequences of arthritis, the participants of the game had to perform everyday tasks. There were five tests: arithmetic, memory, household tasks and daily activities.

The aim of the exercise is to make aspiring doctors realize the difficulties which people go through during the ageing process, helping them by putting them in the patient's position. In fact, The European Higher Education Area includes empathy as one of its skills. This is normal practice in medical faculties in United States, but has not been undertaken by any European University, according to Jaume March. " Geriatrics has not been included in the new study plans and we wanted to introduce it with this experience", explained the professor.

Twenty people between 18 and 71 have participated in the ageing game. The staff of the Geriatric department at the Santa Maria Hospital have also collaborated. The course with a duration of 20 hours, finishes this Thursday.

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Experiencing for themselves the limitations in sight, hearing and mobility which elderly people normally suffer will help doctors of the future put themselves in their patient's position

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