A Houston five-year-old known as David is getting a "space suit," a vitally important gift that will give him mobility he has never known. David suffers from a rare malady called severe combined immune deficiency, which means that he was born without natural body defenses against disease; germs that would have little or no effect on most people could cause his death. As a result, he has spent his entire life in germ-free isolation rooms, one at Houston's Texas Children's Hospital, another at his home.

It helps the sightless to obtain jobs, win promotions, and enter vocational areas once closed to them. For example, a typewriter attachment permits a blind secretary to read what she is typing, to make corrections and to fill out printed forms. Another accessory allows a blind engineer or scientist to read the visual display of an electronic calculator.

The Optacon is one of the most dramatic examples of how technology transfer is improving the status of millions of people in all walks of life.
The "space suit" David is getting will allow him to spend four hours at a time in a mobile, sterile environment outside his isolation rooms. Built by NASA's Johnson Space Center, it is a specially-designed byproduct of space suit technology known as the mobile biological isolation system. A rubberized garment with a soft, transparent plastic helmet, the suit is connected by a 10-foot hose to a transporter/ventilator; two battery-powered fans blow filtered air into the helmet and used air is expelled at the ankles. (In photo, the suit is modeled by another child.) David's medical care is supervised by Baylor College of Medicine's Research Center at Texas Children's Hospital.