

The Ostomy Life Study Review is a recurring publication developed by Coloplast in cooperation with expert ostomy care nurses in the Global Coloplast Ostomy Forum.

Chronic condition means *chronic homework*



There is more to having a chronic condition than following your treatment. Learning how to live with your condition everyday is just as important – and naturally doctors and nurses play a major role in teaching patients how to cope with this ‘chronic homework.’

Research shows that nurses play a key role in helping patients cope with the ‘chronic homework’ of taking care of their ostomy on a daily basis. This is one of the

conclusions in a recent article by Ayo Wahlberg, Professor at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen.¹

And while this may not be surprising news to an ostomy care nurse, it certainly highlights the importance of helping patients with the transition from being hospitalised and in treatment to living a normal life with an ostomy.

Chronic homework

More and more patients, who would have been terminally ill 10 or 20 years ago, are now living with their ostomy.² Obviously this is a good thing - but it also represents a challenge. In his article Ayo Wahlberg cites anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly and her colleagues, who have used the term 'chronic homework' to describe the amount of work that patients with a chronic condition put into keeping their daily lives on track.^{3,4}

For people with an ostomy this would entail daily tasks such as changing their ostomy pouches and keeping the skin around the ostomy healthy. On a general level patients are, however, also conscious about how they can fit their chronic homework into their daily activities. *How will I live my life with a chronic condition?*⁵

A life changing experience

According to Professor Wahlberg, it is important to acknowledge how much the amount of chronic homework can weigh down on people with an ostomy and affect their quality of life. It's life changing to receive a chronic diagnosis.^{6,7,8}

Ostomy care nurses play a key part in helping patients learn how to deal with the added stress of dealing with chronic homework in addition to recovering from major surgery. This includes encouraging patients to check their peristomal body profile regularly in order to make sure their ostomy appliance still fits over time.

Ostomy care nurses as chronic homework coaches

Indeed the role of ostomy care nurses is shifting from being strictly medical towards more of a coaching role. And while it's obviously still important for patients to follow their treatment, it's equally important for them to learn how to live with the 'chronic homework' of their chronic condition. And the person they will turn to for guidance will almost certainly be their nurse.

Sources: ¹Manderson and Smith-Morris, 2010, Fluid States: Chronicity and The Anthropology of Illness; ²Mattingly et al., 2014, Cult Med Psychiatry; ³Pols, 2013, Sci Technol Stud; ⁴Becker, 1998, Disrupted lives: How people create meaning in a chaotic world; ⁵Bury, 1982, Social Health Ill; ⁶Charmaz, 1983, Social Health Ill; ⁷Wahlberg, 2009, Contested Categories: Life Sciences in Society.



Want to learn more?

The aim of the Ostomy Life Study is to raise awareness about important aspects of ostomy care by sharing empirical data, clinical insights and inspiring trends in order to improve the standard of care. To get more insights from the Ostomy Life Study, please contact your local Coloplast office.