Talking About Sexuality – The Silent Scream
A Personal Journey to Comfortably Discussing the Unmentionable

Andrew Bird – Lead Stoma Care Nurse, Queen’s Medical Centre, Nottingham
Overview

- Define sexuality
- Ostomates’ barriers to discussing sexuality
- SCNs’ barriers to discussing sexuality
- Four stages of learning a new skill
- My Journey
- Summary
Sexuality is expressed in the way we speak, smile, stand, sit, dress, dance, laugh, and cry and is an integral part of who we are, what we believe, what we feel, and how we respond to others.
The Silent Scream - Barriers to Discussing Sexuality

- Embarrassment
- Fear/Anxiety
- Frustration
- Guilt/Shame
- Depression
- Medical concerns
- Performance anxiety
- Body changes
- Sexual orientation
- Misinformation
Barriers to discussing sexuality – SCN perspective

- Embarrassment
- Lack of Time
- Vulnerable – knowledge gap
- Personally confronting
- Fear of causing offense
- Too personal
- Someone else will do it
- Professional ethical concerns
- Misconceptions about importance of sex/intimacy issues to the patient/partner
The Four Stages of Learning a New Skill

Unconsciously unskilled
- Incapable and unaware
- “I don’t know what I don’t know”

Consciously unskilled
- Recognition of poor performance
- “I know what I don’t know”

Consciously skilled
- Practice, practice, practice!
- “I know what I have to do but need to think about it”

Unconsciously skilled
- Naturally competent
- "I know what I am doing without thinking about it now"

Adapted from Gordon Training International (2018)
My Journey

Unconsciously unskilled
- Responsibility of the Colorectal CNS?
- Was I consciously unskilled but using this as an excuse to avoid my discomfort?

Consciously unskilled
- University of Ulster stoma care module – wake up call!
- ASCN UK – ‘Breaking Barriers and Enhancing Relationships’
- Sought advice from Chandos Clinic (psychosexual therapists)
- Clinic invite letters adapted – put sex on the agenda

Consciously skilled
- Practice, practice, practice!
- ExPLISSIT model (Davis and Taylor 2006) – Permission-giving is key to opening up discussions.
- Test the waters, gradually increase the emphasis on the topic of sex and sexuality
- It is okay to not have all the answers

Unconsciously skilled
- Not there yet but getting there

Adapted from Gordon Training International (2018)
Summary

- Sexuality is an important part of our lives
- Ostomates may wish to talk about sexuality with their SCN
- Barriers to overcome from both sides
- Giving permission to discuss sex can facilitate the discussion
- Practice makes permanent (unconsciously skilled)!
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THANK YOU FOR LISTENING

References
