

The rise of the stoma care nurse

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Having spent the last 25 years as a stoma care and colorectal nurse specialist, I have seen many changes as the specialism has evolved. This includes an increase in the number of nurse specialists available to look after patients, as well as the numbers of manufacturing companies who offer products developed along research and evidence-based trajectories. Compare the old black rubber bag in *Figure 1* to the more modern products we have today (*Figure 2*).

The art of stoma care nursing comes with the experience of looking after patients with both complex and standard needs after stoma surgery. University-based nurse training has perhaps allowed nurses to specialise more quickly in a field of nursing after qualification and not necessarily after a protracted

length of time gathering experience within general nursing first.

The first stoma care courses were run by the English National Board for Nursing and Midwifery (ENB) in the 1980s in conjunction with experienced stoma care nurses (SCNs), which gave the **clinical nurse specialist** a recognised qualification and showed that the subject had been studied in depth, with a clinical placement in a recognised colorectal unit. This was considered essential to anyone holding a stoma care post and was usually completed within the first 12 months. Since the ENB was disbanded, we have seen a shift and stoma care courses have been adopted by some universities, often in affiliation with industry. While this has supported SCNs, the lack of clinical experience gained from undertaking a clinical placement in another institution has perhaps detracted from that exposure to complex patients, which develops nurses' **thinking and critical skills**

[AQ1: critical thinking skills] Lack of consistency within courses and no benchmarking makes it hard to judge the value of the contents of the courses.

It is clear that we have come a long way since the 1980s, with most stoma care departments having a team of nurse specialists who can offer a wider range of services such as functional bowel nursing, **inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)** and cancer nursing. Nurse-led services are prolific and provide great satisfaction for patients who value the nurses' holistic approach to care, as well as the advanced assessment skills and knowledge specialist nurses possess.

Much has been said about the value of nurse specialists, which increases the attractiveness of these posts for employers. But actually, nurse specialists value these posts because they are able to provide timely, expert care to patients, using knowledge and expertise to find solutions to practical problems, as

well as being valued as part of a multidisciplinary team.

The Association of Stoma Care Nursing UK (ASCN UK) has gained credibility and momentum since its inception in 2012 and gives SCNs clinical guidelines and standards of care, which allow their practice to flourish. It allows nurses to share best practice, as well as network with colleagues at **national conference** with opportunities to present at a national level. We continually strive to learn more, develop more and share more to ensure our patients receive the very best care at all times. **BJN**



Figure 1. Black rubber bag circa 1960



Figure 2. Selection of modern day products