

# Accessing Clinicians Online – Addressing Individuals' Questions via a Community Website

Before and after stoma surgery, people face a number of emotional and physical challenges. They often have questions about stoma care, ostomy products, ostomy-related issues, and lifestyle matters — ranging from the simple to the complex. How should individuals generally prepare for surgery? What is the typical recovery process? How do people with ostomies find the right products and learn how to use them properly? How do they solve leakage problems? Getting answers to these questions is not always easy.

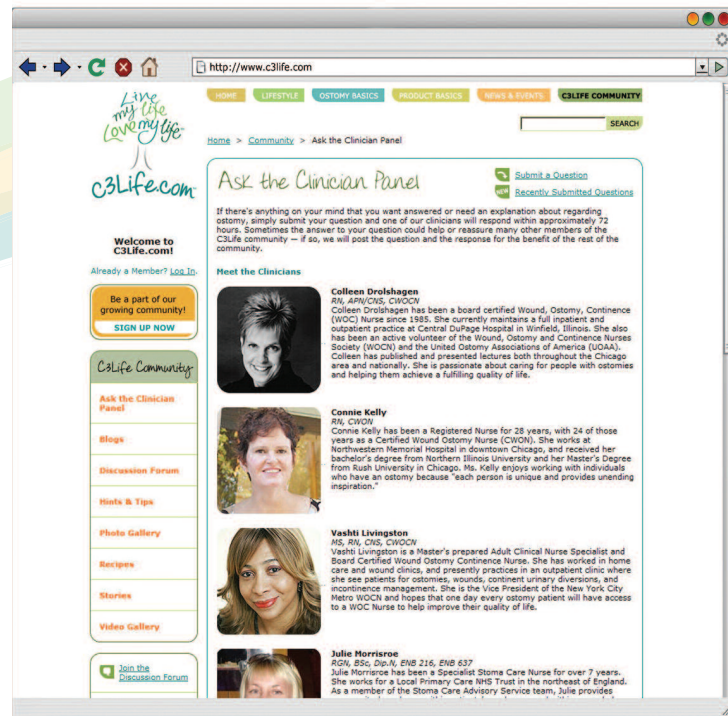
Because of shorter hospital stays, time devoted to education can be limited. And even when the opportunity for more comprehensive education is possible, people may not retain the information communicated to them in the hospital due to the stress and exhaustion associated with surgery. In addition, some people may be reluctant to seek answers from a clinician if they live in a remote location, are busy, or are hesitant to bother him or her. Ideally, people with ostomies would connect with a clinician in person when they have an ostomy-related lifestyle or product question. However, this is not always possible. Fortunately, there is another option: connecting with a clinician online.

Internet access in US households is prevalent, and many people are seeking health-related information online. Submitting ostomy-related lifestyle and product questions to a clinician online can be very convenient. This path allows access from the convenience and comfort of home or work, and the ability to ask a question 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also provides the option of anonymity, if desired, providing a level of privacy that is important to some.

- The average hospital stay in the US decreased from 5.7 days in 1993 to 4.6 days in 2007.<sup>1</sup>
- Because of these shorter stays, “opportunities for effective teaching of basic ostomy and equipment routines...<are> lessened greatly.”<sup>2</sup>
- As of August 2009, 74.1% of US households had Internet access (versus 44.1% in 2000)<sup>3</sup>
- In 2009, more than half of US adults aged 18 to 64 looked up health information on the Internet.<sup>4</sup>

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One place where people can access clinicians online is **C3Life.com**<sup>SM</sup> — a community-based website for people with ostomies, their caregivers, and loved ones. C3Life.com offers an “Ask the Clinician Panel” feature that allows individuals to submit ostomy-related lifestyle and product questions to a group of clinicians.

To pose a question, individuals must supply the Panel with background information, including their location, type of stoma, age, gender, and length of time since surgery. They can choose to supply their real name, or a screen name (a pseudonym used when communicating with others online) if they prefer the privacy of that approach. Panel clinicians typically respond within approximately 72 hours, and recommend face-to-face consultations with a Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurse (WOCN) and/or physician when appropriate. Additionally, all questions and responses are posted on the site so individuals can learn from the experiences of others.

- 1 HCUP Nationwide Inpatient Sample (NIS), Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). 2007. <http://hcupnet.ahrq.gov/HCUPnet.jsp>
- 2 D'Orazio, Mike and Ozorio, Christine. On the Lack of Universal Ostomy Follow-up. *Journal of Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing*. May/June 2008.
- 3 Nielsen Online. 2009. The International Telecommunication Union. 2000. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/>
- 4 National Center for Health Statistics. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. February 2010. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6120HM20100203>

## Advertorial

A sampling of user-submitted questions to the C3Life.com website can be found below:

*"I have a urostomy...I was wondering if I will be able to go swimming?"*

*Submitted by debsluck1*

*"My Mother has had a colostomy for a year and a half. It seems to work fine for a while and then all of a sudden it starts leaking no matter what they try. She has tried one- and two-piece systems (paste, tape, etc.) and sometimes nothing seems to work. Any suggestions?"*

*Submitted by jreliason*

*"I have had a temporary ileostomy for about 3 months. My husband and I just resumed having intercourse about a week ago. The other night my skin barrier came loose and I had a leak. How can this be prevented next time?"*

*Submitted by katandbob*



Connie Kelly, RN, CWON, has been a member of the C3Life.com "Ask the Clinician Panel" since the launch of the website in 2008. She has been a Certified Wound Ostomy Nurse for over 24 years and currently works at

Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Connie believes the "Ask the Clinician Panel" offers many benefits to people with ostomies:

*"At the hospital, you answer the questions patients are asking, but they don't always absorb it all. It's an intense situation and they're receiving a lot of information."*

Kelly knows from experience that many people with ostomies continue to have lifestyle and product-related questions – even months and years after surgery. "They may not know how to get in touch with a local nurse or may be reluctant to contact him or her. 'Ask the Clinician Panel' is a good way to provide information to them, so they can keep living their normal lives," she adds. "Also, since life with an ostomy involves continuing change, it is helpful to have another source of information. Getting an individualized response is beneficial, as opposed to assuming something seen on the Internet is appropriate for him or her. That's why I became involved with C3Life.com."

The following comments highlight how people with ostomies, caregivers, and nurses appreciate the responses provided by the clinicians on the C3Life.com "Ask the Clinician Panel":

*"Thanks so very much for your suggestions. Nice to know you all are here to help!"*

*Submitted by Nateysmama*

*"I think it took me longer to type my previous question than the time it took you to answer it! Thank you very much for your time, help, and thoughts."*

*Submitted by Francisco*

*"Great resource info. you are for all of us. Thanks again."*

*Submitted by DebRN*

*"There are not too many resource persons that I can seek help from, so I am always happy that you all are a click away."*

*Submitted by simple*

*"Thank you for the access to others' questions and your suggestions. It helped us to realize that many of the problems we have been experiencing are typical of an ileostomy, and can be handled."*

*Submitted by homehealthnurse*

*"This is an awesome website. It is so nice to be able to ask questions and get answers."*

*Submitted by missnancy48*

*"I think your site is excellent – I didn't realize so many people had the same problems as myself."*

*Submitted by CAROLTOM*

*"C3Life.com provides a convenient way for a person with an ostomy to connect with a Stoma Care Nurse. This connection is invaluable for problem solving and education. When a person with an ostomy has a problem, they need easy access and timely feedback. With C3Life.com it is just a click away!"*

*Jan Colwell (RN, MS, CWOCN, FAAN), University of Chicago Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois*

Finding information and support can be a challenge for people with ostomies. Today, there are more ways than ever to find both. Websites like C3Life.com offer an opportunity to connect with a clinician online and get answers to ostomy-related lifestyle and product questions – so individuals can get back to the business of living their lives.