

# The value of learning from others



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Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), a British philosopher and sociologist, once remarked, “The great aim of education is not knowledge but action”.

The content within this issue of the Journal has led me to reflect on the value of learning from others. The actions, learning processes and resultant behavioural changes through clinical and personal experiences, research and education are interlinked themes within the articles presented.

There are many definitions and concepts related to learning. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines learning as, “The acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught”<sup>1</sup>. Gross describes learning as, “... the process of acquiring new, or modifying existing, knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, or preferences”<sup>2</sup>.

Conceptually and in practice these constructs may broadly apply to organisations as well as individuals. The World Council of Enterostomal Therapists® as well as individual enterostomal therapy (ET) or stoma therapy nurses (STNs) have a long and proud history of education and teaching and sharing their knowledge and skills; in particular, to assist patients to regain an optimal health status, achieve independence in managing their ostomies and feel they remain a valued member of society. A similar philosophy is extended between colleagues when the need arises.

Often, however, there are substantial obstacles to overcome that impede teaching/learning, and adaptation processes or the integration of new knowledge or research into clinical practice or higher learning institutions. These barriers may relate to the way an individual learns or their readiness to learn, physiological barriers, language, culture, literacy or in respect to institutions, a lack of willingness to change, lack of resources or political and economic constraints<sup>3</sup>.

In recognising the wonderful work undertaken by Marilyn Spencer our President, Dr Elizabeth Ayello, has described

Marilyn as a ‘doer’. Clearly, Marilyn was an action- and outcome-driven person who inspired others with her educational abilities and desire to improve ostomates’ lives as well as the professional profile of ET nurses.

Naomi Houston outlines the enormous contribution made by Dr Rupert Turnbull to colorectal surgery, stoma care and ET practice alongside Norma Gill. His commitment to research and education and sharing his knowledge and expertise for the benefit of others, whether health professionals or patients, is well documented.

The learning experiences and research outcomes of the Guyana Project, led by Ostrow and Sibbald *et al.*<sup>4,5</sup>, in part inspired Ogbogu and colleagues’ research project. They assessed patients with diabetes in two hospitals in Nigeria for patterns of high-risk foot disease using the standardised 60-second foot screening tool developed during the Guyana Project to guide early intervention and treatment measures to reduce the incidence of foot amputations.

Similarly, Pinto *et al.* have reflected on prior research on skin tears within the last five years to guide development of a nursing protocol for the prevention, assessment and management of skin tears in a new hospital in the United Arab Emirates.

The overall aim of health clinicians and health educators is to support unwell patients through their medical episode. And, in that journey to assist patients to transition from being invalids and recipients of care to actively participating in self-care, thereby becoming active versus passive learners<sup>6</sup>.

Actively using ‘tips and hints of the trade’, gained over many years of experience, and by applying simple teaching/learning strategies, Pat Walls was able to assist her patient to regain his self-confidence in managing his urostomy and subsequently restore his self-esteem and achieve a better quality of life.

In their book *Essential Stoma Care*, authors Jennie Burch and Pat Black lend their collective clinical experience to provide a useful text on basic stoma management. Similarly, the WCET® has a wide range of texts and guides to support clinical practice, for example, the *WCET™ Guide to Stoma Site Marking*<sup>7</sup> and *WCET Ostomy Pocket Guide: Stoma and Peristomal Problem Solving*<sup>8</sup>.

The value of learning from others to substantiate existing or acquire and apply new knowledge or skills that may result in positive organisational or individual behavioural changes within the domains of wound, ostomy and continence care should not be underestimated.

As Benjamin Franklin reflected, “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”

Regards,

Jenny

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