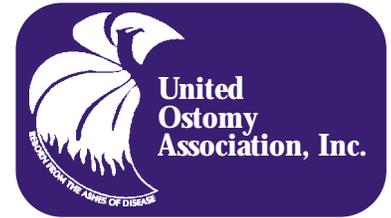


GAY AND LESBIAN OSTOMATES (GLO) AND THEIR CAREGIVERS

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The UOA is a volunteer-based health organization dedicated to providing education, information, support, and advocacy for people who have had or will have intestinal or urinary diversions.



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Helping All Ostomates

In keeping with its mission of helping all people with ostomies, the United Ostomy Association in 1982 established the Gay and Lesbian Ostomates (GLO) Committee. The committee works to assist gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities live more positively with an ostomy.

Needs and Concerns of Gay and Lesbian Ostomates

Gay and lesbian ostomates, like all ostomates, are confronted with a variety of concerns during their recovery. These concerns are universal throughout the ostomy community and can pertain to diet, odor, ability to work and the enjoyment of recreational activities. In addition, body image, sexuality, relationships and the reactions of loved ones can be of concern.

Many gays and lesbians are concerned with actual, perceived or anticipated prejudice they may experience. Therefore, many are reluctant to reveal their sexual orientations to health professionals and ostomy visitors. This limits the effectiveness of the caregiver, particularly where intimacy and sexuality issues are concerned.

Creating A Climate For Discussion

Perhaps the most important step that can be taken on behalf of the gay and lesbian ostomate is to establish a comfortable, non threatening environment in which he or she feels free to talk openly about sexuality and intimacy issues. This is often a very important part of the recovery process.

Guidelines for Health Professionals and UOA Volunteers

The following guidelines are intended to open up discussions on intimacy and sexuality. These discussions should help the gay or lesbian ostomate understand that it is "OK to come out" if he or she wishes.

1. Acknowledge to yourself your own feelings and attitudes about gay or lesbian people. This is an important first step and helps you to set aside bias in the interest of respond-

ing to the patient's needs. Learning about homosexuality and discussing your feelings with friends, co-workers, other GLOs, other visitors, or ostomy nurses familiar with gay and lesbian ostomates are helpful.

2. Establish a rapport and show interest in the patient as a person. When dealing with something new or unknown, we tend to focus on that aspect and lose sight of the overall purpose.
3. Use language inclusive of same-sex as well as opposite-sex orientation. An example of a question you might ask: "Is there a particular person who will be involved in your care, such as a significant other or domestic partner?"
4. Initiating discussions regarding sexuality can be a complicated matter for both the patient and the visitor. You may say, "I want you to know that I am comfortable talking with you about sex and intimacy for ostomates." Make sure you are truly comfortable discussing intimacy and sexuality before making this offer. If you are not totally comfortable with discussing sexuality with the patient, please contact a GLO committee member.
5. Offer the patient a list of resources including those available for gay and lesbian ostomates. This is of particular benefit to the person who does not feel free to come out to you.

GAY AND LESBIAN OSTOMATES PRIMARY GOALS

- Address the unique needs of gay and lesbian ostomates as well as other sexual minorities.
- Assist health care professionals and UOA volunteers in serving gay and lesbian ostomates.
- Provide information about resources for gay and lesbian ostomates and their caregivers.

RESOURCES

- A newsletter for the gay or lesbian ostomate
- An Internet site, www.uoa.org
- A network of gay and lesbian ostomates and supportive others who offer mutual aid and information
- Informal discussion groups for gay and lesbian ostomates and their friends in some areas
- An e-mail network
- Informational programs and social events for gay and lesbian ostomates at UOA conferences