



**WOCN**<sup>®</sup> Wound, Ostomy, and  
Contenance Nurses Society<sup>®</sup>

# **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE ACCESS TO OSTOMY SERVICES, PRODUCTS, TECHNOLOGIES, AND INNOVATION**



The undersigned organizations strive to ensure that any individual living with a permanent or temporary ostomy has access to evidence-based, quality healthcare services and products, delivered by a baccalaureate-prepared or advanced practice certified ostomy specialty nurse, and the prescribed medical prosthetic technology needed to preserve their health and well-being.

Over 120,000 people annually have fecal or urinary ostomies. An ostomy is a surgical procedure that involves the removal of diseased portions of the gastrointestinal or urinary system and the creation of an artificial opening in the abdomen to allow for the elimination of body wastes, which in most instances, makes the use of a prosthetic device a necessity. More than 700,000 Americans – from infants to senior citizens – have had ostomy surgery.

An ostomy procedure is essential for many individuals who suffer from serious chronic or life-threatening illnesses such as colorectal cancer, bladder cancer, Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, birth defects, and other intestinal or urinary medical conditions. Also, ostomies are necessary in certain cases of severe abdominal and/or pelvic trauma. In recent years, there has been an increase in such traumatic injuries suffered by soldiers on active duty in the military.

For individuals suffering from such conditions, ostomy surgery is both life-saving and life-changing. Following ostomy surgery, a person can no longer toilet normally. Rather, they require specially-fitted medical devices – in most cases for the rest of their lives - which allow them to engage in activities of daily living, be physically active, participate in the workforce, etc., thus ensuring their physical and emotional well-being. On-going innovation in ostomy management technology and access to certified ostomy specialty nurses have dramatically improved the lives of those who have undergone ostomy surgery. Ensuring that the right ostomy device is available to meet each individual's permanent health care needs post-surgery is a vital part of recovery and rehabilitation.

Ostomy devices are necessary for restoring lost functionality as a result of surgery, and as such, are defined in the Social Security Act as prosthetics (U§1861(s)(8)). Like any prosthetic, they are selected and fitted for individuals based on the unique medical and physical needs of each person with the assistance of specially trained health care professionals. By defining ostomy devices as prosthetic devices Congress clearly differentiated between standard commodities and customized prosthetic care, recognizing the individualized fitting and clinical oversight required for these devices.

Further, as a result of provider cost-cutting, nurse shortages, and other reasons, the selection and fitting of ostomy devices is often performed without the benefit of a baccalaureate-prepared or advanced practice-certified ostomy specialty nurse. This situation puts patients at risk and adds to health care costs when inappropriate and ill-fitting ostomy prosthetics lead to skin complications, infections, physician office visits, emergency room visits, and, in some cases, hospitalizations.

The undersigned organizations and individuals, therefore, adopt the following set of principles to support policy development, ensure sustainable access to ostomy services and prosthetic devices, and promote continued innovation in ostomy technology.

**We ask that Congress and the Administration:**

- Acknowledge that ostomy devices are defined as prosthetics under the Social Security Act and should be categorized, covered, and reimbursed by government and private insurers in a manner that recognizes that designation;
- Recognize the important role that baccalaureate-prepared or advanced practice certified ostomy specialty nurses have in the selection and fitting of ostomy devices for patients, and in the education/training of individuals in the proper use of the devices;
- Recognize that individuals require access to specific ostomy devices that meet their specific medical needs, and that such products are not generic, one-size-fits-all commodities;
- Realize that ostomy devices, as prosthetics, are not appropriate for inclusion in competitive bidding programs or other similar programs that eliminate access to the array of ostomy products that are medically necessary to meet their specific health care needs;
- Ensure fair coding and coverage processes that will permit new ostomy prosthetic technologies to come to market and encourage continued private investment in the development of such technologies; and
- Ensure Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurers within healthcare exchange marketplaces cover the full-range of prescribed ostomy medical devices needed as a result of ostomy surgery, and do so in a manner that is not economically burdensome for the consumer or the overall healthcare system.

**American Association of Critical-Care Nurses  
Coloplast  
Convatec  
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation  
Friends of Ostomates (FOW)  
Hollister Incorporated  
La Salle University Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nursing Education Program  
National Association of Neonatal Nurses (NANN)  
Nu-Hope Laboratories, Inc.  
Ostomy 101 Inc.  
Ostomy Policy Coalition  
R. B. Turnbull Jr. MD Wound Ostomy Continence Nursing Education Program  
Spina Bifida Association  
Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates, Inc.  
Society of Urologic Nurses and Associates (SUNA)  
The Pull Thru Network  
The Youth Rally Committee  
United Ostomy Associations of America, Inc.  
United Spinal Association  
Winona State University Wound, Ostomy, & Continence Nursing Education Program  
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