

Welcome to EOA News

Well here we are, half way through the year again. The EC continue to hold Zoom meetings to ensure everything is running smoothly, and individually are involved in various projects. If you have something to share, please get in touch:
carolinebramwell@ostomyeurope.org

Where ostomates rarely tread

Caroline Bramwell, EOA EC, UK Representative



In an endeavour to lead by example and raise awareness, that living life with a stoma need not mean having to limit one's lifestyle, EOA's Caroline Bramwell, took on the challenge to trek up towards Everest Base Camp in the Himalayas in May, where she intended to run the Tenzing-Hillary Marathon - the world's highest marathon.

The trip included both a long-haul flight to Kathmandu, via Delhi, as well as a flight in a small 16-seater plane with minimal baggage allowance, flying into the world's most dangerous airport at Lukla, in Khumbu Pasanglhamu, Solukhumbu District, Koshi Province of Nepal.

Said Caroline: "I had special dispensation to carry extra weight on the plane for my

supplies of stoma appliances, as once I was up in the mountains, I would be totally stuck if I ran out."

The trip in total took three weeks - with nine days of this being uphill trekking with porters. The culture was very different to that lived in the West, and everyone in Nepal was open and welcoming.

Considerations as an ostomate, included being particularly mindful of hydration and the intake of electrolytes.

Said Caroline: "The trekking was extremely tough, and got harder the higher we went, as the air started to thin at altitude."

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Sad news, fond farewells

It is with great sadness that we announce that Prof. Dr. Gerhard Englert, founder of EOA, passed away on 27 May 2026 as a result of a surgery, aged 87.
(Full story on next page.)

We also mourn the loss of Ria Smeijers and Marie Steen (see over)

Blood oxygen levels and heart rates were monitored every morning and evening, to see how Caroline and her fellow trekkers were coping with the altitude.

Unfortunately for Caroline, it was apparent at 4,010m above sea level, that her body was not adjusting for the altitude and her blood oxygen levels had dropped to 65%. Sadly, this meant that Somare Village was Caroline's summit, as it was unsafe for her to go higher.

This meant Caroline had to turn back, and trekked down to a safer level for five days alone, except for a young Nepalese porter who was assigned to carry her large luggage bag.

Said Caroline about the experience: "I went to Nepal to climb a mountain, and whilst I didn't achieve what I set out to do, I achieved so much more than people usually do. The mountains showed me that I wasn't there to

prove myself with a medal, but to have those five days of solitude to reflect on how I can help others to simply step outside their front door after stoma surgery, or confront the outdoors, wherever they may be in the world."



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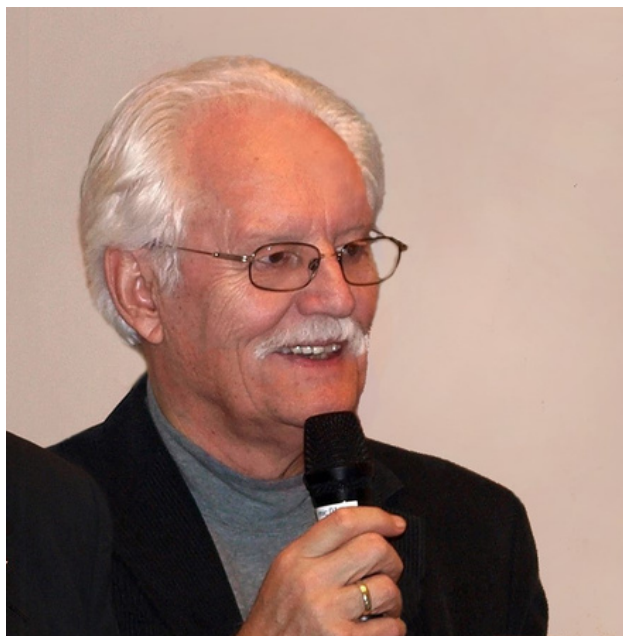
From 1975 to 2012, Gerhard Englert, an ileostomate since 1971, served as chairman of

Deutsche ILCO. Under his leadership, Deutsche ILCO was a co-founder of the International Ostomy Association IOA as early as 1975. Gerhard Englert played an active role in the IOA from the very beginning: from 1975 to 1985 as a member of the Executive Committee, then as Treasurer until 1991, and from 1991 to 1994 as President.

It was during his presidency that the idea of a "World Ostomy Day" was developed, which was held worldwide for the first time in 1993. Since then, a further 10 World Ostomy Days have taken place every three years, each with a different theme.

During Gerhard Englert's time as IOA President, the IOA Executive Board and the member associations drafted the "Charter of Rights for Ostomates", which was also published in 1993. With a few additions, it continues to serve as a guiding principle for health and social policy activities within the member organisations to this day. The Charter sets out a suitable means

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of comparing how much of this has already been achieved in one's own country and highlights where there is a need for action.

As early as before 1990, Gerhard Englert had initiated cross-border meetings with neighbouring German-speaking stoma organisations from Austria and Switzerland. In 1979, he organised the first European regional meeting, which was also the first meeting of European associations under the umbrella of the IOA.

In 1990, he was again the driving force behind the founding of the European Ostomy Association (EOA) in Budapest, Hungary, serving as its founding president from 1990 to 1992. The concerns of ostomates – their ability to live independently and free from discrimination – were the driving force behind his extraordinary commitment. Operated at a time when reliable stoma care was still very much lacking, he knew that simply helping individual

ostomates was not enough. To bring about structural change, the only way forward is to find allies in other organisations, in politics and in the healthcare sector, with whom one can work together to bring about improvements.

In 2012, he received a special honour in recognition of all his services to the EOA and his international work for ostomates' rights: the EOA Executive Board established a fund named after him, 'The Professor Dr Gerhard Englert Fund'.

We, as the EOA EC, are very saddened by his unexpected death. We feel for his family, in particular for his wife Helga who had supported him and his work all his life. We owe him so much. He was a visionary in the truest sense of the word, yet reliable and approachable. It was always a pleasure and an enrichment to meet him. He will be greatly missed.

Powerhouses of the ostomy world

It is unimaginable that we have further sad news to share with you, but in the last few weeks, we have also received news from close family and friends, of the passing of Ria Smeijers of The Netherlands, and Marie Steen of Sweden. Both of these amazing ladies were powerhouses in the ostomy arena and were loved by many.

Former President of European Ostomy Association, Ria Smeijers, was honoured at the IOA Congress in Singapore in October 2023 with the prestigious Archie Vinitzky Award, which is given to an individual who has made the most outstanding voluntary service at international and/or regional level in support of the activities of the IOA. Ria was President of the European Ostomy Association from 2011-2017, working tirelessly for ostomates all over Europe.

Marie Steen equally put her heart and soul into supporting people with stomas, particularly in deprived areas of Africa.



Ria Smeijers



Marie Steen

A member of EOA EC from 2011 - 2014, she continued to play an active part in EOA, as the House of Delegates nominations representative when it came to electing new members to EOA even as recently as October 2025.

Her sense of fun and joy of life will be forever our lasting memories of Marie.

Full tributes to Ria and Marie will be published in our next issue of EOA Newsletter.

Pedalling in Poland for awareness



In May, Jon Thorkelsson joined a team in Poland as part of an awareness programme. He has taken part in this event three or four times previously, which has been expertly arranged by Andrzej Piwowarski, Chairman of the Polish Ostomy Association.

On arriving at Krawkow, it was only a short 20 minute journey to the start line, whereas before it had been a two or three hours' drive to the start point.

Said Jon: "We stayed at three summer houses which made a cluster in the woods around Krakow and were situated almost at the top of a steep hill. The houses were very nicely built and obviously very well maintained. I was handed an electric bicycle and was almost insulted by this but luckily I said okay. If I had been on an ordinary bike the result would most likely have been a heart attack; the area that we were in had many hills that you needed to get up to the top of on the way home or when heading out in the morning."

However, the tour wasn't just about the cycling, as the team of cyclists from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Serbia, and Bosnia, also attended meetings with people from Polilko that were meeting with representatives from the stoma industry, such as the stoma companies Coloplast, Convatec and man more.



Said Jon: "We had one dinner engagement with people from the industry which was very nice. But, once again, it was very clear that my lack of being able to speak Polish was not a good thing."

After five days and cycling, it was time to say goodbye, but Jon is looking forward to taking part again in future years, with hopefully more countries taking part.



World Ostomy Awards project report

Isabella Grosu, ASPIIR - Romania

In the Europe and Africa region of the World Ostomy Awards 2025, it was ASPIIR - the Romanian Association of Persons with a Stoma and IBD - that one first prize with their programme.

Isabella Grosu, President of ASPIIR, was central to an initiative dedicated to people with stomas in Romania and Moldova, offering education and accurate information both for patients and for the healthcare workers involved in caring for these patients.

The project entailed creating a series of testimonials, providing emotional support, sharing experiences about life with a stoma, and help shape attitudes toward surgery that involves creating a stoma.

In addition, the created tutorials about stoma care. These were made with guest stomatherapy assistant Georgeta Păsărin, from the Clinic of Surgery and Liver Transplant, I.C. Fundeni, Bucharest, who presented information about choosing the right device for a stoma, how to apply it correctly, types of devices, and much more.

The project also included the hosting of a webinar for ostomates and nurses in Moldova and Romania. Held on 23 February, 2026, this was open for free participation for all those interested in stoma care.

A newsletter was sent via email to the database of contacts in Romania and Moldova to patients, doctors and nurses, inviting them to join, to achieve maximum visibility.

The Webinar was a great success, with nurses and ostomates from Moldova sending in questions to be asked within the webinar, where answers were explained step by step.



The project also included the production of tutorials. These recorded videos explain stoma care or patients step by step in Moldova and Romania. These were recorded at the ASPIIR office in the FUndeni Clinical Institute, Bucharest by professional videographers. These tutorials were very well received and have been presented at other different events for patients and doctors in Romania or Moldova.

Educational sessions on surgery for stoma construction, stoma care and their complications, were further organised by ASPIIR, with the support of Prof Dr Adrian Hotineanu and the Society of Surgery from Chişinău.

