leak and they need reassurance and support when trying a new product.

Product delivery services can pre cut flanges for patients, which is helpful for those who find scissors difficult to use.

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT
People who are blind or have visual impairment can learn to care independently for their stoma (Burch, 2008). Allowing them to familiarise themselves with new pouches through touch may help them to find a system they can use. Some may find mechanically coupled two piece products useful as they can feel the ring and hear the audible click when fixing the pouch together. Others may prefer a pouch with an adhesive coupling (see Fig 1). All patients should have an opportunity to try different products until they find one that suits them.

Using a flange cutting service from the delivery company can help maintain independence by ensuring the flange is consistently cut to size to fit neatly.

Some people with visual impairment may have to rely on help from family or carers, which can be distressing and embarrassing and may result in a change in relationships if a partner takes on a caring role. Nurses need to be aware of how people with a stoma and family members feel about this and ensure that all other options are explored.

MEMORY LOSS
Ageing may affect memory and some older people can forget they have a stoma appliance or forget to empty it.

People with a poor memory may benefit from written instructions being placed in the bathroom and toilet or where they usually sit during the day to prompt them to think about caring for their stoma.

A written step by step guide can act as a refresher and checklist to ensure they have remembered all their equipment and the pouch changing procedure.

A standing order can be arranged where products can be delivered automatically each month and patients do not have to worry about running out of stock.

If memory loss reaches a point where the individual cannot remain independent, a care package at home or a residential care home may be considered. It is important that the stoma care nurse is informed of any changes so that teaching and information tailored to the individual can be incorporated into their plan of care and long term support.

CHANGES IN DIET
People often find they eat less as they get older, due to inactivity and loss of muscle mass. Some older people may not feel like cooking and eat snacks throughout the day. This can result in constipation or diarrhoea. Nurses can compile a list of the foods that will help thicken output or prevent constipation.

Patients should be encouraged to take small, well balanced meals with plenty of fluids to help maintain their weight and manage stoma output.

ADMISSION TO A GENERAL WARD
Ward nurses should deliver stoma care as part of general nursing care. It is often informed and empathetic ward nurses who support, educate and advise patients with a stoma and have a positive impact on the quality of care (Porrett and McGrath, 2005).

Ward nurses need to be aware of the stoma equipment patients need, where to get stock from and how to assess whether patients are well enough to continue to care for their stoma while in hospital.

While patients may be embarrassed to talk about their stoma, it is important to assess how they have been managing and how their illness will affect their ability to cope.

Assessment should address the following:

- Does the patient usually look after their stoma?
- Does a family member or carer look after it?
- Are they having any problems with the stoma?
- Does the appliance require attention now?
- Do they have their equipment with them?
- Has the stoma care nurse been informed of their admission?

Patients may be in contact with their stoma nurse and ask to see them. If they do not have contact with a stoma care nurse, being admitted may provide a good opportunity to make a referral.

Stoma care nurses have a role in supporting and educating general nurses (Elcoat, 1986). Ward staff should ask for help and advice if they are unsure about any aspect of stoma care.

CONCLUSION
People with a stoma can experience problems as a result of advancing age, disability and ill health. General nurses have an important role in identifying when patients are having problems managing their stoma and should know how to refer them to a stoma nurse. Some people may require long term support from family, carers or healthcare professionals in managing their stoma and general nurses need to be aware of their role in this important aspect of care.

REFERENCES