

Lay Summary

In recent times we have seen a significant rise in the number of individuals living with chronic illness turning to the Internet for information, advice and support. In particular, more and more people are joining online support groups to discuss their experience of their illness and seek information and advice from fellow sufferers. As yet, little is known about the extent to which such online support groups may help those individuals living with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD).

In particular, the project will explore the reasons why individuals who are already members of an IBD online support group decided to join and how they feel it may meet their particular support needs and more importantly, help them manage and cope with the challenges of living with IBD. It will also consider whether there are any problems or difficulties when using online support groups. In order to do this, interviews will be conducted with individuals who have joined a range of online support groups (e.g. IBD and Me, Facebook etc) in order to learn more about their online experiences.

The project will also explore the topics of conversation which arise within IBD online support groups. Much can be learnt from looking to see what issues arise for discussion and how group members may help one another in dealing with any IBD-related challenges or problems.

Once completed, the project will benefit individuals living with IBD by providing important guidance and recommendations on how online support groups should be used and developed in the future.