

Managers' guide

Menopause



Use of the word “menopause” can instantly cause sniggering with jokes made about hot flushes and the need for fans. We know it’s not a laughing matter for many women. For some women it can also have a major impact on all aspects of their life, both working and personal.

Aim of the guide

This guide aims to help line managers understand the impact that the menopause can have on some members of staff and equip them to better support these individuals in line with NHS Golden Jubilee’s Attendance policy.

Women transitioning through the menopause may be experiencing symptoms that can impact their work life, so it is crucial that you as line manager are able to provide the necessary support and understanding to your staff. You need to understand the potential health and wellbeing implications of the menopause in order to effectively manage our ageing gender equal workforce of the future.

The NHS Golden Jubilee Workforce

Our workforce is changing, with the retirement age increasing and staff working longer. Currently within NHS Golden Jubilee, women comprise approximately 70% of the workforce and approximately 33% are aged 45 and over.

The average age for women to experience the menopause in the UK is 51. However, it can occur between the ages of 45 and 58 and, in rare cases, before the age of 40. With 33% of our female workforce over the age of 45, this equates to approximately 600 women in the workforce.

Menopause Facts

The menopause affects women’s emotional and physical health differently. Being aware of the basic needs is necessary to support women going through this transition. The menopause can last from four to eight years and the symptoms may include:

- Hot flushes
- Palpitations
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbance
- Night sweats
- Skin irritation
- Irritability
- Mood disturbances
- Poor concentration
- The need for more toilet breaks

The health impacts of the menopause on women’s physiological and physical wellbeing can affect how they work, their relationships with colleagues, and productivity.

More specifically, menopausal symptoms such as heavy and painful periods, night sweats, insomnia, lack of concentration and forgetfulness can lead to problems with work performance, difficulties in making decisions, and decreased confidence.

Menopause and the Equality Act

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disability as existing where there is an impairment having “a substantial and long-term adverse effect on ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

Discrimination on grounds of “disability” is prohibited and this covers “a limitation which results in particular from physical, mental or psychological impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder the full and effective participation of the person concerned in professional life on an equal basis with other worker’s. The limitation is a long-term one and that it was sufficient to meet the definition of disability that there is a “hindrance” to the exercise of a professional activity.

It is also well-established that the particular cause of impairment is not relevant to whether it is to be regarded as disabling; it is the limitation which results from it.

If employees are not supported properly there is a risk they can bring a claim for ‘sex discrimination’ under the Equality Act 2010. Recent unfair dismissal tribunal cases have found employers culpable of sex discrimination for failing to consider menopause symptoms in the same way as other medical conditions.

How to support staff

It is recommended that a line manager should:

- ensure that they have an awareness of the menopause; the signs and symptoms and the effect this may have on some staff members’ ability to carry out their role at times;
- where support is required, consider a flexible working hours arrangement;
- be able to signpost to informal and formal sources of support; and
- consider improvements in workplace temperature and ventilation.

In addition, affected staff members should be advised to seek help in the form of self-help management or medical help to manage the symptoms.

For further information

For confidential advice on the menopause or how to manage it, please contact Occupational Health. Alternatively, Human Resources can provide support.

Useful links

- www.sandyford.org/sandyford-sexual-health-services/what-are-our-services/gynaecology-and-menopause/menopause/
- www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/
- www.menopausematters.co.uk

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