

THE NHS STAFF COUNCIL
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING
PARTNERSHIP GROUP

Menopause at work

March 2020

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The menopause

With a predominately female workforce in health and social care, many of whom are in their late 40s to mid-50s, a significant number will be experiencing menopausal symptoms. Trans, non-binary and intersex people can also experience the menopause. In addition to this there is approximately 1-10 per cent of the population who experience an early menopause or premature ovarian insufficiency.

For some people, the menopause, which is sometimes referred to as transitioning, may be uneventful and not impact on their working life but for others it may become increasingly difficult to function effectively at work and their working conditions may exacerbate their symptoms.

The NHS Staff Council's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partnership Group has developed the following principles to support NHS organisations to improve the way they address the menopause and work. This is complemented by principles for line managers and staff.

Organisational principles

PRINCIPLE 1

SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND BOARD COMMITMENT

An important first principle is having a clear statement from the chief executive and the board that recognises that the menopause is a workplace issue. The business case for supporting staff experiencing the effects of the menopause has gained momentum over the last few years. It is essential that NHS organisations take action to support and retain a skilled and experienced workforce and reduce unnecessary absence from the workplace.

Furthermore, there is strong evidence that prioritising the wellbeing of NHS staff can impact positively on patient outcomes and productivity. A positive statement about the menopause can contribute to morale, motivation, retention and productivity.

“The menopause, whether pre, during or post, can be varied in its impact, especially within the workplace and we want to raise awareness of it at work and support women that are struggling with symptoms. We need to remember that some of our most successful employees are female, but because they are now working into their 60s and the average age of menopause being around 51, they’re battling with symptoms that can really affect them.

We need to support these women and ensure that they can continue to work and feel happy at work. It’s also important to remember this isn’t just an issue for women, men should be aware too so they can support colleagues, friends and family, and our patients too.

We’re one of the first NHS trusts to put best practice in place and to talk openly about menopause and I would encourage other employers to do the same.”

Suzanne Banks, Chief Nurse, Sherwood Forests Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

“We want to remove the taboo and recognise that the NHS workforce, which is getting older, must be able to move through all stages of their lives, ageing happily while working for the NHS. By giving them a great place to work, they can provide the best care and decide themselves when they want stop working.”

Sue Harriman, Chief Executive, Solent NHS Trust

PRINCIPLE 2

DEVELOP AND/OR REVIEW EXISTING POLICIES

Having a stand-alone menopause policy or amending existing policies will confirm the organisation's commitment to seeing the menopause as a workplace issue. Some organisations have chosen to have stand-alone menopause policies while others have included it in existing policies, including policies on managing attendance at work; uniform policy; health and wellbeing related policies; special leave/flexible working policies and disciplinary policies. Where existing policies are amended or reviewed to add a link to the menopause, organisations need to assure that they are equality impact assessed and monitored, particularly those relating to performance, capacity and sickness absence.

Examples of policies

[NHS Wales Menopause Policy](#)

PRINCIPLE 3

WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH TRADE UNIONS

Taking a partnership approach to supporting staff experiencing problems with the menopause is important. Staff side representatives are often the first people staff go to if they have an issue and can provide useful support and advice on the working environment. Staff side reps should be able to attend any relevant information and training on the menopause either through their union or alongside line management training. Staff side reps should also be involved in the development of policies or amendments to policies relating to the menopause.

"As trade unions we have been supporting the campaign for a number of years to raise awareness of the effect of the menopause on individuals affected by symptoms and the impact on the workplace. At Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust we recognise there is a legal and, more importantly, a moral duty of care to individuals who experience negative menopausal symptoms.

"There has been true partnership working between managers, trade unions, clinicians and employees to reduce the taboo of the menopause in the workplace, engaging in constructive and open dialogue leading to an improved experience for those who are experiencing menopausal symptoms in the workplace.

The work has also concentrated on educating managers to become aware of the importance of the topic, support they should offer and highlighting the risk if this topic is not discussed and addressed."

Roz Norman

Staff side Chair

(Partnership Lead (UNISON) & SFH Staff Governor)

Sherwood Forest Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

PRINCIPLE 4

KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Employers have a duty of care to the people they employ. It is important to be aware of responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Equality Act 2010. Staff experiencing difficulties with the menopause may need adjustments to their working environment; equally, unsafe and unhealthy working environments may exacerbate problems.

Resources

[Welsh TUC Risk Assessment Toolkit](#)

[Civil Service Menopause at Work Toolkit](#)

PRINCIPLE 5

TRAIN YOUR LINE MANAGERS

Line managers play an essential role in supporting those who may be experiencing problems related to the menopause. It is vital that managers are aware of the potential impacts that menopause transition can have on staff, including staff who are living with partners going through the menopause. Training managers alongside union representatives is also recommended so that union reps are aware of all policies and procedures relating to the menopause and can ensure fairness if someone is experiencing workplace performance or attendance difficulties due to the menopause. It should also be noted that, for a number of reasons some employees may be reluctant to approach their direct line manager so employees should also be signposted to other sources of support such as human resources, occupational health or

ACAS advice

It is advisable for an employer to develop a policy and train all managers, supervisors and team leaders to make sure they understand:

How to have a conversation with a worker raising a perimenopause or menopause concern

How the perimenopause and menopause can affect a worker

What support and changes for the worker might be appropriate

The law relating to the menopause.

[ACAS 2019](#)

PRINCIPLE 6

RAISE AWARENESS

In addition to raising awareness among managers and staff going through the menopause, it's important to raise awareness among the workforce. Colleagues and partners may be the first to observe the effects of the menopause at work. Colleagues who have awareness of the issue will also have a better understanding of any adjustments that may need to be made in their workplace. Awareness raising can take innovative forms such as menopause cafes, posters and online apps. Where available, NHS organisations should utilise staff with expertise in women's health to develop awareness raising sessions and tools such as clinical nurse specialist.

Menopause Café

The concept behind the Menopause Café was the brainchild of Rachel Weiss from Rowan Consultancy who was keen to remove some of the barriers that have so often made the menopause an uncomfortable and off-limits subject for discussion for so many women and their families.

Belfast City Hospital hosted its first Menopause Cafe 14 January 2019. Staff were invited to come along for a tea and a chat in a friendly setting.

Velindre University NHS Trust has become the first workplace organisation in Wales to introduce a Menopause Café open to all staff.

PRINCIPLE 7

BE AWARE THAT INCREASED SICKNESS ABSENCE OR CHANGES IN PERFORMANCE MAY BE RELATED TO THE MENOPAUSE

The effects of the menopause may impact on staffs' ability to be at work or their performance while at work, for example, sleep deprivation caused by night sweats may lead to excessive fatigue; heavy bleeding may make it difficult to leave the home and lead to fatigue from iron deficiency. When carrying out sickness reviews, appraisals or one-to-one meetings, managers should consider whether the absence or changes in performance may be related to the menopause and where possible offer support and adjustments such as temporary changes to shift patterns/start time, working from home and time off to attend medical appointments.

Resources

[CIPD The menopause at work](#)

[ACAS Menopause at work](#)

PRINCIPLE 8

RECOGNISE THAT THERE IS NO 'ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL' APPROACH

Everyone's experience of the menopause will be different so there is no uniform approach to take. Regular informal discussions between staff and employers will help recognise any problems at the earliest stage. Employers should be aware that, in some cases, the health effects may be so severe that they fall under the definition of a disability under the Equality Act.

Employers should make the adjustments that may be needed and know where to signpost for support.

Guiding principles for line managers

1. Attend training and awareness raising opportunities around the menopause and work, and be clear about your role and responsibilities as a line manager
2. Understand that some staff, particularly those who are trans, non-binary and intersex may be more hesitant to seek support due to a perceived stigma around the menopause. Furthermore, people with protected characteristics may face barriers to seeking support e.g. a person with an existing disability. Provide signposts for them to further support such as staff networks or external organisations.
3. Allow your staff time off to attend menopause awareness related training/ sessions. All staff should be able to attend awareness raising sessions, including colleagues of staff who may be experiencing the menopause and those who may be supporting a partner experiencing the menopause.
4. Ensure you are familiar with the menopause and work policies or policies that mention the menopause and work.
5. Think about the physical working environment that you are responsible for and work in partnership with local trade union safety reps to identify potential issues that may impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of staff going through the menopause e.g. lack of ventilation, hot environments, lack of access to drinking water and toilets. Work with safety reps to develop solutions and escalate to the health and safety committee if necessary.
6. Where staff are experiencing problems with performance, attendance or sickness absence, consider that it may be related to the menopause. Approach the issue sensitively and seek advice from occupational health as necessary.
7. Where staff are having difficulties maintaining attendance or performance due to issues relating to the menopause, consider what adjustments could be made Such as change to shift times. Seek advice from occupational health as necessary.

Guiding principles for all staff

1. If offered and interested, attend any menopause awareness raising sessions at work.
2. Familiarise yourself with any policies related to the menopause at work. This will help improve your understanding of the menopause and work and what support is available.
3. If you are experiencing problems at work which you think may be related to the menopause, such as increased sickness absence or the impact of your working environment, seek help at the earliest opportunity. Your manager, union rep, occupational health provider or GP can all provide support and signpost you to further advice
4. The menopause can manifest in many different ways including impact on your mental health, ability to concentrate and remember things as well as your physical health.

If you are experiencing difficulties, don't be embarrassed to come forward for help and support. Employers and trade unions recognise that the menopause can be a challenging time for some staff and there may be adjustments that can be made to support you at work.

Further information

[The effects of menopause transition on women's economic participation in the UK](#), recommends changing organisational cultures, compulsory equality and diversity training, providing specialist advice, tailored absence policies and flexible working patterns for mid-life women.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) [Let's talk menopause](#) resource provides managers with tools on how to effectively support women going through the menopause at work.

The Faculty of Occupational Medicine's (FOM) [Guidance on menopause and the workplace](#) and [infographic](#) highlights that nearly eight out of ten menopausal women are in work. FOM also found that many women are unwilling to disclose menopause related health problems to their managers. The guidance offers practical guidance on how to improve workplace environments.

[Business in the Community NI and Belfast HSC Trust](#)

[Menopause Café](#)

[Transgender & menopause](#)

[TUC guidance on menopause & trans gender](#)

[GMB Women's health and safety guidance \(including menopause\)](#)

[NHS Employers Menopause and the workplace](#)

[Royal College of Midwives 'Working with the Menopause](#)

[Royal College of Nursing Menopause webpage and guidance](#)

[TUC Menopause at work \(interactive guide\)](#)

[UNISON Menopause webpage and guidance](#)

[UNITE Women's health, safety and wellbeing at work \(including menopause\)](#)

The NHS Staff Council's Health, Safety and Wellbeing Partnership Group (HSWPG) is a sub-group of the staff council and was established to:

- raise standards of workplace health, safety and wellbeing in healthcare organisations
- promote a safer working environment for all healthcare staff
- promote best practice across the NHS and independent sector.

The group has produced a range of useful guidance and information on topics such as, lone workers, managing musculoskeletal disorders and back pain, sickness absence and stress.

 www.nhsemployers.org/HSWPG

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