



Cross Government Menopause Network



The Menopause, why its good to talk.

The menopause is a normal life event for a woman. It's not an illness or a medical condition and it's certainly not the doom-laden metamorphic 'CHANGE' that it was thought to be in my grandmother's day! But despite great work being done to progress the cause of health and wellbeing and diversity and inclusion in the workplace, the 'M word' remains a word that is mostly unspoken or in some cases seen as taboo. As a result, many women experiencing the peri-menopause and the menopause are doing so in silence.

In reality some women are living anything from between 4-8 years (and beyond for some) of their lives experiencing symptoms that can be physically, mentally and emotionally difficult and they live through it alone, not wanting to cause social discomfort or awkwardness by speaking up about what they are experiencing and how they might be feeling.

My personal experience is that like most women, I had a general idea of what to expect - hot flushes, irregular periods, moodiness - symptoms that are most commonly associated with the menopause, but I didn't realise was how disruptive, intense and severe some of these symptoms can be.

I wasn't expecting bouts of dizziness and nausea requiring me to lie down for an hour at random times of the day. I was expecting to feel a bit tearful, a bit snappy. I wasn't expecting to feel completely out of control of my emotions to the point that antidepressants were the only logical answer. Crying at the simplest comment or imagined slights. I was expecting irregular, heavier periods. I wasn't expecting to bleed three weeks out of four, or to have such excruciating period pain that I couldn't stand straight or be without pain relief.

No one told me it could be like that. No one warned me that these symptoms might be severe and intense so that I could recognise and work through those times to limit the impact on me, my colleagues, my family, my work.

There is a myriad of other relatively minor things that go alongside the more severe symptoms like – forgetfulness, poor concentration, weight gain (the weight creeps on and on and on...), forgetting what I wanted to say mid-sentence, aches and pains and fatigue.

I know that not every woman has an experience like I did but speaking with friends and colleagues (those who were not too embarrassed to talk about it) I came to realise there are women around all of us that are experiencing serious suffering in silence.

I am now post-menopause, I have come out the other side, but some symptoms of menopause continue on - I still get night sweats and hot flushes during the day as I didn't know that I would still sometimes feel menopausal despite being post menopause.

My experiences are why I believe the work of the Cross Government Menopause Network is so important. The Guiding Principles and toolkit they have produced for use by women, line managers and colleagues help to bring an otherwise un-discussable subject out into the open so no one need feel alone or suffer in silence.

Whilst the Civil Service Menopause products are primarily aimed at information, advice and guidance relating to women, they are also relevant for anyone who might be undergoing any form of hormone treatment as often the symptoms can be very similar or indeed the same

Marina Bolton, Civil Service HR Director.