

## The Menopause and Placement Practice



**Tanya Barrass and Dr Helen Hooper, Northumbria University**

**Do you know what the common link is between people and narwhals, killer whales, beluga whales and short-finned pilot whales?**

**These are the only mammals currently known to undergo menopause! This is a light-hearted attempt at illustrating the void in public and cultural discourse surrounding menopause. Despite menopause affecting half the worlds population, it is rarely featured in TV, films, novels or other popular media, which can make women experiencing menopause feel excluded and invisible and may mean some women do**

**not recognise their symptoms as menopause-related. This general lack of knowledge combined with persistent stigma and shame surrounding menopause, and around ageing more broadly, can be a barrier to both accessing and providing support for women experiencing the negative impacts of menopause in the workplace.**

### **Workplace impacts**

Two thirds (67%) of working women surveyed by the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) reported menopause symptoms had a mostly negative impact on them at work, with over half recalling at least one occasion when menopause symptoms prevented them going to work. [The British Menopause Society](#) revealed 45% of women find it difficult to discuss the menopause at work, with 47% stating that they would not tell their employer the real reason if they needed to take a day off due to menopausal symptoms.

One in ten working women surveyed by the [Fawcett Society](#) reported they left work due to menopause symptoms.

### **Employers' legal obligations**

In 2024 in order to raise awareness and promote positive change in workplace culture to support female workers experiencing menopause symptoms, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) issued new [guidance to employers](#) about their legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010 affords workers legal protection from [direct and indirect discrimination](#), [harassment and victimisation](#) on the basis of protected characteristics including [disability](#), [age](#) and [sex](#).

The EHRC advises employers that if menopause symptoms are chronic and have substantive impact nempoyer has a legal obligation to make [reasonable adjustments](#) and to not directly or indirectly discriminate because of the disability or subject the woman to discrimination arising from disability. Women experiencing menopause symptoms may also be protected from discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of age and sex.

### **Placement practitioners can help change workplace culture by destigmatising menopause**

As placement practitioners typically work in female dominated teams and services, there is scope to enhance the support and advice provided to the students we help who are seeking or are in placement, and colleagues experiencing menopause. Practitioners can also help increase awareness and destigmatise menopause by normalising workplace discussions around menopause more generally across our institutions. This is important as research shows many women do not feel well informed.





### **Menopause can effect women- students and colleagues- of all ages**

The majority of women naturally reach menopause around the age of 50, however menopausal symptoms can affect women at any age. About 1 in 20 go through early menopause (age 40-45) and about 1 in 100 naturally experience premature menopause (before age 40). Many people are also unaware that the lead up -perimenopause- can take up to 10 years, during which time women may start to experience a range of signs and symptoms that can negatively impact on their ability to concentrate, general confidence and self- esteem.

### **Practical approaches to managing symptoms that practitioners can adopt**

Normalising discussions about menopause could help women identify practical changes to manage their symptoms at work. For example uniform adjustments, a fan or a move to a cooler part of an office can all be helpful if a woman is experiencing hot flushes. Mobile technology- such as phone reminders- can be useful to help manage 'brain fog' etc. This highlights the importance of encouraging a student experiencing menopausal symptoms to discuss personal requirements with placement staff and employers.

The [International Menopause Society](#) (IMS) designate October as [World Menopause Awareness Month](#) to “raise awareness of the menopause and the support options available for improving health and wellbeing” and provide a range of useful advice and resources which placement practitioners can use.

[Menopause cafés](#) across the UK provide friendly and informal support from people going through similar experiences. [NHS](#) information, includes advice on medical treatments such as hormonal replacement therapy.

#### **What are the signs and symptoms of the menopause that can affect work?**

- The menopause is formally defined as when a women stops menstruating for 12 months (and occurs because of reduced levels of the hormone oestrogen)
- Each woman experiences menopause differently, and common signs and symptoms include; hot flushes, sleep problems and night sweats, vaginal dryness, weight gain, thinning hair, dry skin and a loss of breast fullness
- Many women also experience 'brain fog' and anxiety and depression, which can arise from either hormonal changes or result from the impact of other symptoms of menopause on their mental health

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