Menopause for thought

Ending taboos about a condition society is reluctant to face.

“Research has shown that the more women reported experiencing menopause-related symptoms, the less engaged they felt at work”

Dr Louise R Newson

The menopause is a subject that is often considered a taboo, and its effect on the mental, emotional and cognitive well-being of menopausal women, their colleagues, friends and partners is seldom talked about.

Many women associate the menopause with hot flushes and night sweats, however, the symptoms of reduced self-confidence, low self-esteem, irritability, fatigue, anxiety and depression often affect women, particularly at work.

Research has shown that the more women reported experiencing menopause-related symptoms, the less engaged they felt at work, and the more inclined they were to quit.

I see numerous women in my clinic who tell me they have reduced their working hours, changed roles or even given up work altogether as they had been making mistakes, struggled with learning tasks or generally felt too tired.

I am constantly astonished at how little women and men know about symptoms of the menopause and the associated health risks, including increased risk of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis.

There are currently around 3.6 million women aged between 50 and 65 years in employment across the UK, and women represent nearly half of the entire labour force. This should mean that the menopause is as important as any other occupational health issue.

It is likely that early diagnosis, education and adjustments can act as a preventative measure for menopause-related sickness. Furthermore, when the menopause is managed correctly, not only can it reduce absenteeism, it enables women to talk about their concerns with colleagues.

Increasingly, organisations are looking at health and wellbeing strategies in the workplace as there is an established link between health and performance in the workplace. It is recommended that employers support menopausal women as part of a holistic approach to employee health, such as suitable adjustments to the physical and psychosocial work environment and the provision of training to line managers.

It is vitally important that women are properly educated about treatment options for the menopause, including hormone replacement therapy (HRT). This choice is the most effective treatment for the control of symptoms and has been shown to improve the function of women at work. In spite of the many myths connected with it, for the majority of women under the age of 60, the benefits of HRT outweigh any risks.

In conclusion, for women to feel comfortable with the challenges of the menopause at work, society itself must shift away from old fashioned perspectives.

Dr Louise R Newson is a GP and runs a private menopause clinic at Parkway Hospital, Solihull. Go to menopausedoctor.co.uk

Reader's Voice

Does your employer recognise the menopause as a condition?

HAVE YOUR SAY @pharmafield