



MENOPAUSE POLICY

Introduction

1. Menopause is a natural part of life; however, it isn't always an easy transition. Whilst not everyone going through the menopause suffers with menopause symptoms, supporting those who do will improve their experience at work and benefit the workplace.
2. The menopause refers to the time when periods stop, and the ovaries end their reproductive function. Perimenopause is the period leading up to this. Menopausal symptoms usually start in the mid-forties and continue for several years.
3. Menopause can have an impact on how someone does their work and their relationship with colleagues. Again, the symptoms may not be consistent and can vary between individuals and from day to day. Unfortunately, there can be little understanding of the issues and little support for those undergoing menopause, especially in the workplace.
4. We need to be able to openly discuss the menopause, what it is and the impact it has in the workplace. We want to normalise conversations about this subject and reduce the stigma around it that some can feel. To support this, we will offer training as required.
5. The following is intended as guidance for members of Three Stone Chambers ("Chambers") (including pupils) and staff, providing information about how menopause may impact, and support you might be able to offer. We acknowledge that everyone is different and can be affected in different ways, but we trust that all might find it useful.

Aims

6. The aim of these policy principles is to:
 - a. Let you know that we are aiming to create an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations about menopause symptoms, and the effect of these at work.
 - b. Ensure everyone understands what menopause is and how it can affect colleagues and are aware of the support available.
 - c. Ensure that members and staff suffering menopausal symptoms feel confident to ask for support should they need it, as well as any reasonable adjustments to allow them to work more comfortably.

- d. Reassure colleagues going through Perimenopause that we will always take a sympathetic and supportive approach and will consider the impact menopause could have on them.
 - e. Equip members of Chambers (including pupils) and staff with greater knowledge of the impact, and effects, of menopause.
7. We acknowledge that menopause can affect those who do not identify as women. This policy recognises that it is not only those identifying as women that may be affected, and the understanding, acceptance and flexibility shown to women experiencing the menopause will be shown to others.

Definitions

8. Menopause is defined as a biological stage in life that occurs when hormones change and eventually menstruation stops. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when periods have stopped for 12 consecutive months (for those reaching menopause naturally).
9. Perimenopause is the period, usually lasting several years, prior to menopause when the hormonal balance fluctuates and becomes unstable. In general, the body produces less oestrogen, and also less progesterone and other hormones responsible for regulating the menstrual cycle, leading to fluctuating physical and emotional changes. However, this process doesn't happen overnight, and can take several years – usually 4-5 but sometimes up to 15 – during which symptoms can vary and change.
10. Post-menopause is the time after menopause has occurred, starting after periods have stopped for twelve consecutive months.

Symptoms

11. Not everyone undergoing menopause will have symptoms or need help or support. However, 75% of those in menopause do experience some symptoms, and in 25% of cases these symptoms are considered severe.
12. Symptoms vary hugely in duration, severity, and potential impact. We recognise that everyone's experience of the menopause will be different but some of the most common symptoms experienced are as follows:
- a. Hot flushes;
 - b. Night sweats;
 - c. Sleep disturbance;
 - d. Irregular periods including heavy bleeding;
 - e. Weight gain and/or increased appetite;
 - f. Genito-Urinary problems for example vaginal discomfort, urinary frequency/incontinence;
 - g. Digestive problems;
 - h. Problems with memory;
 - i. Difficulty concentrating;
 - j. Joint and muscle pain;
 - k. Headaches;

- l. Abnormal sensations such as tingling, electric shock sensations, burning sensations, itchiness;
- m. Hair loss;
- n. Dizziness;
- o. Loss of confidence, difficulty making decisions or problem solving;
- p. Low mood and irritability, feeling “down” and lacking in motivation and drive;
- q. Mood swings;
- r. Anxiety, constantly worry about things, feelings of being overwhelmed, panic attacks;
- s. Tearfulness;
- t. Forgetfulness and brain fog;
- u. Tiredness and lack of energy, general feeling of sluggishness;
- v. Reduced patience and tolerance;
- w. A general feeling of “not being yourself,” that there’s something not quite right.

Possible effects on work

13. Effects on work can include:

- a. discomfort at work;
- b. fatigue at work;
- c. reduced engagement with work;
- d. reduced job satisfaction;
- e. reduced commitment to the organisation;
- f. higher sickness absence;
- g. an increased desire to leave work altogether;
- h. difficulty with time management;
- i. reduced emotional resilience;
- j. impaired ability to complete tasks effectively;
- k. adverse impact on relations with colleagues/feeling professionally isolated;
- l. loss of professional confidence;
- m. embarrassment around colleagues.

Support we can provide

14. We recognise that not everyone will be comfortable disclosing menopause-related difficulties to those they work with. However, members should feel welcome to discuss difficulties, and the support that can be provided, with the Senior Clerk, Head of Chambers or their deputy or an Equality and Diversity Officer and should expect a sympathetic ear and a flexible and supportive response.
15. Any such discussions will be in confidence.

16. We aim to provide an open and supportive culture that allows the provision of practical support to those going through menopause.

Practical help

17. We recognise that symptoms can fluctuate and are a temporary so will not last forever. We will be led by the particular member of Chambers (or pupil) or staff member in terms of what supportive measures they feel will help.

18. Practical ideas to think about include:
 - a. access to fans;
 - b. good ventilation including windows which open and blinds that can be drawn;
 - c. ability to control temperature via air conditioning or heating;
 - d. access to cold drinking water to allow better management of hot flushes;
 - e. clean, well-equipped, and comfortable toilet facilities near workstations, with appropriate sanitary disposal bins and feminine hygiene products, for anyone experiencing heavy or irregular periods or urinary incontinence;
 - f. working environment: a reduction of exposure to noise to help reduce fatigue; quiet workplace rest areas, to aid relaxation when needed;
 - g. alterations to working hours or case load;
 - h. last-minute cover when/if needed;
 - i. periods of leave if/when needed;
 - j. access to counselling services, whether via Chambers or via the Wellbeing at the Bar Hub;
 - k. support in finding a "buddy";
 - l. support in engaging with professional coaching to regain confidence;
 - m. anything else you think of that may help you.

Conclusion

19. As a result of the above information, Chambers will now ensure implementation of the recommendations contained within this document, thus making it a policy, with the aim of providing facilities and a working environment which is supportive of colleagues as well as raising awareness throughout Chambers.

20. Further support and information:
 - a. NHS Menopause Conditions
 - b. NICE Guidance
 - c. British Menopause Society
 - d. Women's Health Concern
 - e. Henpicked Menopause Hub
 - f. Menopause matter