
Menopause Policy

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1 Policy Statement

- 1.1 PSOW is committed to ensuring that all women are treated fairly and with dignity and respect in their working environment. It is also committed to ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the workforce.
- 1.2 During the menopause, women may experience a range of physical, psychological, and emotional symptoms. For many women, these symptoms can have a detrimental impact on their enjoyment and quality of life and make working life more difficult.
- 1.3 The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales recognises that women may need additional consideration, support and adjustments before, during and after the menopause. PSOW will work proactively to agree adjustments where necessary to support women experiencing symptoms of the menopause and to ensure the workplace does not make their symptoms worse.
- 1.4 This Policy does not form part of the contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. PSOW may also vary this procedure, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case. Substantial changes to this Policy will be made only following consultation with the Staff Representative Council. This Policy has been agreed following consultation with the Staff Representative Council and applies to all staff regardless of status or length of service.

2 Aims and objectives

- 2.1 The aim of this Policy is to support an environment at PSOW where women are able and comfortable to raise issues with managers and colleagues about their experience of the menopause. Also, to enable them to discuss reasonable adjustments where that may be necessary to help them cope with the impact of the menopause at work.
- 2.2 It aims to increase managers' awareness and understanding of the menopause and its impact on some female staff. It aims to raise awareness and understanding among staff and to outline adjustments and support that are available. The Policy aims to minimise the potential for negative attitudes by PSOW colleagues and staff.

3 Legislation

- 3.1 The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers. Under the Act, employers are required to do risk assessments which should take account of any specific risks to menopausal women.
- 3.2 The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. Conditions linked to the menopause may fall within the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments. The Public Sector Equality Duty (Wales) places a legal obligation on PSOW to consider how it can positively contribute to a fairer society through paying due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not.

4 Key principles

- 4.1 It is recognised that individual experiences of the menopause can vary widely, with women affected in different ways and to different degrees over different periods of time. Any support or adjustments that may be needed will seek to reflect this.
- 4.2 Training and awareness raising sessions will be provided for managers. Appropriate information about the menopause and available support is shared through this Policy, and further information will be made available to staff if that is needed.
- 4.3 Managers will be aware of the difficulties linked to the menopause that some women experience and will take any specific difficulties into account in implementing PSOW's practices and policies.
- 4.4 PSOW will take reasonable steps to address any specific risks arising from the needs of women experiencing the menopause. PSOW will make reasonable adjustments to meet needs arising from "impairment" as defined by the Equality Act as a result of the menopause.

- 4.5 Staff may seek confidential advice and support through the HR Adviser, or using the details in the Signposting & Support sections of this Policy.
- 4.6 As well as this Policy, PSOW has a range of working practices and policies in place for all staff, but which can be used to support women during the menopause. These include flexi-time with limited core hours, the Flexible Working Policy, the Wellbeing Strategy, the Equal Opportunities Policy, and the Staff Standards of Conduct Policy.

5 Definition and Symptoms

- 5.1 The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women. More detailed information about the menopause, its associated symptoms, and some self-help suggestions are attached as an Appendix to this Policy.

Who is affected?

- 5.2 PSOW recognises that a large and increasing proportion of its workers will be working through and well beyond the menopause. The menopause affects all women to varying degrees, and it may indirectly affect their partners, families and sometimes colleagues as well.
- 5.3 The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, but it can happen much earlier (known as early and premature menopause). For some women the menopause is precipitated by surgery, or following treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.
- 5.4 People from the non-binary, transgender and intersex communities may also experience menopausal symptoms. Due to a variety of factors, the experience of the menopause may be different for those among these communities. Experiences and perceptions of the menopause may also differ in relation to disability, age, race, religion, sexual orientation or marital/civil partnership status.
- 5.5 A common form of treatment to manage symptoms of the menopause is hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Some women using HRT may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

6 Workplace factors and access to workplace support

Workplace factors

- 6.1 The menopause is a very personal experience and different workplace factors, adjustments and levels of support will be needed for different individuals. PSOW is committed to ensuring that managers are sympathetic and provide appropriate support and adjustments when needed to help women deal with issues arising from the menopause.
- 6.2 Taking account of some of the common physical symptoms of the menopause, PSOW aims to ensure that the office environment is well lit and ventilated. While any member of staff must be mindful of the impact on colleagues, staff generally have control over the temperature at their desk. Desk fans can be provided on request. Cold drinking water is provided in the kitchens. Staff experiencing menopausal symptoms should feel able to temporarily excuse themselves from meetings if that becomes necessary.

Access to support: Alternative point of contact/support

- 6.3 Although all managers are expected to take a positive and supportive approach towards discussions about the menopause, PSOW understands that some individual staff members may feel uncomfortable talking directly to their line manager if they are experiencing problems, especially if the line manager is male or much younger. Therefore, other options are available including the HR Adviser and self-referral for Occupational Health advice. PSOW also understands that women may wish to approach another manager whom they trust, or that they may wish to approach their union representative for support.

7 Key actions and adjustments

Risk assessments

- 7.1 Managers should ensure that when assessing risks, the specific requirements of menopausal women are considered. Managers, along with Corporate Services, should ensure that the working environment is suitable and will not make women's symptoms worse. This consideration will assist with the identification of any potential adjustments which may be required.

7.2 Managers should take account of any additional issues raised by individuals affected.

Discretion in the implementation of existing policies

7.3 The effects of the menopause and any side effects from HRT should be taken into account in the implementation of sickness absence, capability, disciplinary and performance policies to ensure that menopausal women are not unfairly penalised and do not experience detrimental treatment as a result of their symptoms.

Flexible working arrangements

7.4 Changes to working time arrangements can be made available where needed and where this can be accommodated. Changes could include adjustments to start/finish times, reduced hours, options for home working or additional breaks. Requests for annual or flexi leave may sometimes be made at shorter notice than usual, and these can be granted where this can be accommodated. PSOW asks women to raise issues related to menopausal symptoms where these are factors in such requests, so they can be taken into account. Communication can be done through other routes set out in paragraph 6.3 if a woman prefers to do so.

Visits outside the office

7.5 It may become more difficult and stressful for women experiencing menopausal symptoms to undertake visits outside the office, especially to private homes. This is because there may be limited access to drinking water and toilet facilities, and control over the environment is likely to be very limited. Managers should deal sympathetically and sensitively with such issues and concerns.

Workload and work-related stress

7.6 Where symptoms of the menopause are such that they may need reasonable adjustments within the Equality Act, consideration can be given to an individual's workload. It is also possible that, where women find their concentration is

severely impacted during the menopause, consideration could be given to the type of work they are asked to do, for example, perhaps re-balancing straightforward work against complex work.

- 7.7 In respect of casework, managers should be sensitive in the nature of complaints that they allocate to staff, to take account of any potential emotional impact.

8 Signposting and support

- 8.1 PSOW would encourage staff to discuss any issues of concern that may relate to menopausal symptoms with a manager.
- 8.2 However, wherever a member of staff would prefer external information, advice or support this can be accessed as follows:
- HR Adviser – Effective HRM - 03300 414 589 gemma@effective-hrm.co.uk or hr@effective-hrm.co.uk
 - Occupational Health Self-Referral – via HR Adviser

Other information sources

- NHS information pages: www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx
- Healthy Working Wales: www.healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk
- British Menopause Society: www.thebms.org.uk/
- Menopause Matters: www.menopausematters.co.uk
- The Daisy Network: www.daisynetwork.org.uk

9 Review and publication

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed every 2 years and published internally and externally.
- 9.2 Any queries about this policy can be directed to policycontrol@ombudsman.wales

Definitions, Symptoms, Treatment & Self-Help

Definitions

The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55, but it can happen earlier. Many women experience the menopause before 45 (early menopause) and a significant number of women experience the menopause before the age of 40 (premature menopause). Some women experience a medical menopause which can occur suddenly when the ovaries are damaged or removed by specific treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery.

The menopause refers to the point in time when menstruation has ceased, and a woman has reached the end of her reproductive life.

The peri-menopause, which is the period of hormonal change leading up to the menopause, can often last for several years although for some women it may last just a few months. The duration of the peri-menopause varies greatly in different individuals.

During the time of the peri-menopause women may begin to experience symptoms due to changes in their hormone levels. These symptoms may vary in degree between different individuals from mild to very significant. Because they may still be having regular periods at the onset of symptoms, women do not always realise that they are experiencing the peri-menopause and may not be aware what is causing their symptoms. This can be a barrier to accessing support.

Symptoms

Most women will experience some symptoms, with varying levels of severity. For some women, the symptoms will have a significant impact on their life and their sense of well-being. Symptoms can extend over many years.

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There can be many physical symptoms associated with the onset of the peri-menopause, including:

- hot flushes
- palpitations
- night sweats and increased perspiration during the day
- insomnia and significant sleep disturbances
- fatigue
- headaches and joint aches
- dry skin and skin irritation
- dry eyes
- hair loss
- urinary problems
- irregular and/or heavy, painful periods, flooding.

There may also be psychological symptoms including:

- depression
- anxiety
- panic attacks
- poor concentration
- changes to mood
- problems with memory
- loss of confidence.

Beyond the menopause, due to lower levels of certain hormones, women can be at an increased risk of certain conditions such as developing osteoporosis ('brittle bones') and heart disease. These risks increase for women who have an early or premature menopause.

Treatment

Some women seek medical advice and treatment for the symptoms of the peri-menopause and menopause. A common form of treatment is hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Many women find this helpful for alleviating symptoms, but HRT is not suitable or appropriate for all women. Some women using HRT may experience side effects which may also require adjustments in the workplace.

Self-help measures

Current health promotion advice to women highlights the importance of lifestyle choices before, during and after the menopause and the benefits of:

- Healthy eating – research has shown that a balanced diet can help alleviate some symptoms and help keep bones healthy
- Eating regularly
- Drinking plenty of water, some women find chilled water helpful
- Wearing natural fibres
- Exercising regularly – exercise can help to reduce hot flushes and improve sleep. It can also help boost mood and maintain strong bones
- Consulting with a GP on the management of the menopause and to ensure that any symptoms are not due to any other causes
- Not smoking
- Cutting down caffeine, alcohol and spicy food
- Having access to natural light
- Getting adequate rest and relaxation.

These measures can help with some symptoms of menopause and may also help reduce the risk of osteoporosis, diabetes and heart disease in later life.