

Menopause in the Workplace

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There is no doubt that the menopause is a workplace issue. Women in the age bracket of 40 to 55 are the fastest demographic in the British workforce and given that the menopause primarily affects cisgender women between the age of 45 to 55 (average age is 51), it should be recognised as a long-term health condition that affects a large proportion of the workforce.

Menopausal symptoms can significantly affect the lives of those experiencing them and recent research from the CIPD revealed that 59% of women felt that the symptoms of the menopause had a negative impact on them at work. Symptoms such as poor concentration, memory loss, fatigue and increased stress were deemed to be the most prominent symptoms affecting those in work. Importantly, women also felt unable to disclose their struggles to line managers or colleagues due to worries about being perceived negatively or that their abilities would be questioned. Perhaps unsurprisingly and due to this, 1 in 4 women are leaving the workplace because of the menopause (2021, Benenden Health).

So where should employers start?

- Start the conversation on the menopause. At Browne Jacobson LLP we set up a 'Courageous Conversation' webinar where four of our people bravely shared their own experiences and where factual information was also shared on the menopause i.e. who can it affect and when, what symptoms are associated with it and how symptoms can affect home and work life. Over 100 of our people watched this webinar and it sparked our conversation and helped shape our plan going forwards.
- Make sure there is senior leadership buy-in and assign a sponsor to the work you want to do on the topic.
- Ensure men are also engaged and help work towards building awareness, understanding and how they can positively influence change. You may be surprised with how many men become interested and involved in the conversation, not only to support the agenda on the menopause as line managers but also to understand and best support female partners and family members outside of work.
- Consider and agree appropriate adjustments you can offer to support menopausal employees, here are some examples:
 - Temporary/permanent changes to working arrangements/patterns (in line with flexible working policies)
 - Adjustments to work duties (with the support from medical advice where necessary)
 - Provision of USB fans and access to cold drinking water in our offices
 - Flexibility with dress code wherever possible and if relevant
 - Careful consideration of where the impact of menopausal symptoms has led to increased sickness absence, poor performance/conduct
- Consider specific menopause line manager or menopause champion training to ensure there are people across the firm/company that are educated and well-versed in the topic and the internal and external support that can be offered.
- Set up a menopause community group. At Browne Jacobson LLP, we have a group that is set up in a private Teams chat (which you have to request to join or be invited to) that meets quarterly and is headed by a chair and the menopause firm sponsor. It is a great

opportunity for people to learn, share resources and lived experiences in a safe space. It also operates as an important focus group for firm to reach out to when creating menopause policies, training etc. to gain important feedback from those who it directly impacts.

- Have a menopause policy/guidance document that explains:
 - What the menopause is, including the perimenopause, premature menopause and post-menopause and when it is likely to happen
 - Who the menopause affects, including cis women, transmen, non-binary and intersex people
 - What symptoms may be experienced
 - What support is available for employees in terms of workplace adjustments, benefit providers and external support form specialist charities and agencies
 - Who employees should go to if they wish to speak about their symptoms and to further understand what support is available to them and encourage open conversations in the workplace
 - Detail relevant menopause champions and any menopause communities
- Create a communication plan that encompasses ongoing work on the issue to keep the conversation alive. For example, include relevant updates on the menopause via internal social media channels and online newsletters, promote the work the firm does in supporting employees and focus on relevant key dates i.e. World Menopause Day.
- Investigate your benefit providers and see if they provide menopause specific support i.e. private medical insurance, employee assistance programmes, nutritional advice, mental health support
- Once you have done all this great work, see whether you wish to sign the Menopause Workplace Pledge or become a Menopause Friendly Workplace to ensure long term and sustained commitment to supporting employees affected by the menopause.

For a long time, there was a stigma attached to discussing the menopause in the workplace and none more so than in the legal profession. However, the tide is turning. Both law firms and the wider business community, are waking up to the fact that it is not only a priority for them to provide menopause support from a health, safety wellbeing and D&I perspective but it is also a commercial priority to ensure the retention of talent in this demographic of the workforce.

Laura Mahoney is a HR Business Partner at law firm Browne Jacobson and has been integral in helping to raise awareness of the menopause across the firm.

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