

Written evidence submitted by Childs Farm LTD [MEW0013]

Menopause in the workplace

I am Founder and Chairman of Childs Farm Ltd, an SME and home of the Childs Farm, the UK's leading baby & child toiletries business.

I am a 51 year old woman who has been peri-menopausal for 11 years.

Neither my GP nor gynaecologist – both male – have ever discussed my symptoms as being Peri-menopausal but rather that they were caused by stress.

It was my chiropractor who recommended my seeing a Hormone specialist and I am now on HRT. That was 6 months ago. It has been life changing both at home and at work.

Was I discriminated against?

Well no, because I own the company! But my mood swings caused upset with other members of staff, and had I not owned the business I would probably have lost my job simply because I came across as having 'anger issues'.

My children were 4 and 2 when I started becoming peri-menopausal so they were directly impacted by my mood swings, my very low and dark periods and lack of self-worth. As mothers become older, the impact of the menopause on young children will become more prevalent.

What is the economic impact of menopause discrimination?

At the age we start becoming peri-menopausal means that many women are in senior roles in their organisations, so managing other staff. These symptoms project 'irritational' and 'difficult' labels to women, when they are so many solutions available to help them. So rather than deal with these 'tricky' women, they are let go – and all their wisdom and experience is lost.

In other roles there is again a stigma of being 'difficult', 'time of the month', teary.

Awareness could help direct these women into more fulfilling work lives, and for longer.

Factoring the needs of staff and addressing it in the workplace.

Because of my experience, we have introduced 'Meno-Awareness' in the business for all members of staff so that everyone can understand the symptoms and behaviours of the menopause and the impact that this can have on themselves, other employees, friends, relatives and parents. We achieve this by:

1. Annual talks to staff by Dr Mandy Leondhart, a local Hormone specialist GP who talks about the practical changes that happen to our bodies as we get older – both men and women – with specific emphasis and changes to our hormones during pregnancy and the menopause.
2. Information about the effects of the menopause on women is available on our intranet site
3. A free consultation with Dr Leondhart is available for every female member of staff over 40.
4. Private annual smear and mammogram checks are available to all female members of staff over 40 in order to assure risk of cancer.

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5. HR training on understanding the impact of the menopause on women and signs to look for to support this are actively undertaken.

We aim to have our teams conscious of how hormonal change can have a devastating effect on women, and how to give kindly advice and support around this.

Solutions

13 million women in the UK are peri-menopausal or menopausal – which makes up 20% of the population so educating GP's should be a top priority

The lack of training on menopause within the NHS for GPs – less than one day in their training and only 3% top-up train on the menopause in their careers - means that this is constantly misdiagnosed out of sheer ignorance when it can be so easily treated if understood.

So start with the medical profession being aware of the impact of the menopause on women and the symptoms that manifest, at the same time as getting workplace practices updated.

Education at school is also important: understanding why Mum doesn't seem like Mum anymore is really important for children to know to understand.

The more we can openly talk about this, the more it will be normalised.

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