

## Bristol Women's Commission

### Evidence on Menopause and the workplace

#### Introduction

Established in 2013, Bristol Women's Commission (BWC) brings together representatives from key agencies across the city, working in partnership to identify and address issues that impact women and girls. An independent body, BWC works closely with Bristol Women's Voice, Bristol City Council and Bristol One City.

BWC has five dedicated task groups: Women's Health, Women's Safety, Women in Business, Women and the Economy, and Women and Girls' Education. Each task group is chaired by a commissioner and has a mix of academics, experts and women working in the field.

#### Background

Bristol Women's Commission has been working for several years to influence employment policy around the menopause in Bristol.

Responding to a lack of information about the menopause, we set up a city-wide collaborative working group with other organisations to develop guidance and advocate for menopause policies.

In partnership with University of Bristol and Bristol City Council, we ran 'Our Menopauses... the Great Menopause Event' in November 2017 which invited clinicians, researchers, and women to share their experiences of the menopause and to challenge the stigma and silence surrounding it. Bristol Women's Commission have been working to share best practice and support employers in Bristol to develop robust menopause policies ever since.

Bristol Women's Commission have been supported in this work by our sister organisation, Bristol Women's Voice, who have run menopause workshops and worked with communities to understand women's lived experiences of the menopause and the type of support they require at work.

We felt compelled to respond to this government call for evidence and share our expertise and advice on developing menopause policies for the workplace.

#### Evidence

Bristol Women's Commission is responding to the question: **How can businesses factor in the needs of employees going through the menopause?**

Based on our research with working women experiencing the menopause, Bristol Women's Commission strongly argues for **menopause policies** to be developed and adopted by all employers.

In combination with menopause policies, we advocate for **mandatory training for managers** and awareness raising sessions for all employees about menopause and the workplace.

When developing guidance for how employers can implement robust menopause policies, the following areas should be considered and included:

### **Introduction**

- Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life; some experience worse symptoms than others.
- It shouldn't be a taboo, stigmatised or 'hidden' topic.
- It isn't just an issue for women, men need to be aware too.
- Employer should proactively adjust where necessary to support women and ensure that working doesn't make menopausal symptoms worse.
- Menopause policy should apply equally to transgender employees as needed.

### **Purposes / Aims**

- Foster an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably start conversations and engage in discussions about menopause.
- Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support women at work.
- Ensure that women suffering with menopause symptoms feel confident to discuss it, and ask for support and any reasonable adjustments so they can continue to be successful in their roles.
- Reduce any absenteeism, presenteeism, performance issues or turnover that may arise due to menopausal symptoms.
- Eliminate the risk (and associated fear) that women will be discriminated against and/or lose their jobs due to menopause-related issues.

### **Definitions**

- Information on the definitions of menopause, perimenopause, postmenopause and menopause transition.
- This is important to clarify terms and raise awareness of the menopause and its related stages.

### **Legal framework**

- The Health and Safety Work Act 1974 (section 2) requires employers to ensure 'the health and safety and welfare at work' of all employees. Under the Act, employers are required to do risk assessments under the Management Regulations which should include specific risks to menopausal women if they are employed.
- The Equality Act (2010) prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of certain 'protected characteristics' including sex, age and disability. It is also important to note that conditions linked to the menopause may meet the definition of an 'impairment' under the Equality Act and require reasonable adjustments.

## Symptoms

- Many women will experience menopausal symptoms. The severity of these symptoms can vary; some may have a significant impact on women's everyday activities including work life. 75% of women do experience some symptoms. Symptoms may change and/or develop over time. Common symptoms include:
  - hot flushes
  - palpitations
  - headaches
  - night sweats (and/or increased sweating during the daytime)
  - joint problems/osteoporosis
  - insomnia and sleep disturbances
  - fatigue
  - skin irritation
  - changes to periods such as irregular, heavy bleeding and/or painful periods
  - urinary problems
  - vaginal dryness
  - low mood or anxiety
  - panic attacks
  - depression
  - problems with memory and concentration
- The impact of physical and psychological symptoms in the workplace will vary from individual to individual. As part of the menopause policy development, employers and managers should identify how symptoms can affect women at work and consider the reasonable adjustment(s) that may be required as support. These should then be discussed with the employee to agree the support needed.
- For example, irregular and/or heavy periods could cause distress or embarrassment and may mean that employee needs to use washroom facilities more frequently. Suggested reasonable adjustments might include: easy access to well-maintained, private washroom facilities or single sex facilities; more frequent work breaks to go to washroom; easily available sanitary products; cover for staff to leave posts if needed; provision of an extra uniform.
- For example, insomnia or sleep disturbances could produce fatigue which may be increased by rigid start/finish times and a lack of flexible working options. Suggested reasonable adjustments might include: temporary adjustment of hours; flexible/home working; allowance for additional sickness absence; reassurance that employees won't be penalised if they require adjustments to workload or performance management targets.
- Requests for flexible and/or remote working should be supported.

## **Support and signposting**

- Employers should offer support and signposting to employees about navigating the menopause. This could take the form of:
- Support for managers and HR in identifying appropriate reasonable adjustments as needed, in conversation with the employee.
- Support and up-to-date training for Occupational Health to offer a holistic assessment in line with latest research and guidelines (including possible treatment options).
- Guidance for employees on how to talk to GP about menopause.
- Access to counselling for all staff as required.
- Signposting to other forms of help and advice (including support groups, online information, NHS guidelines).

## **Contact details and further information**

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