

# Menopause in the workplace

[Jacqui McBurnie](#)

Chair of the NHS England/Improvement Menopause Group, Exec Committee member of the Cross Govt Menopause Network

**Menopause** appears to be having a moment. Celebrities are promoting books, leading campaigns, presenting research based programmes and even linking with MPs to raise awareness<sup>1</sup>.

**W**e covered menopause back in 2019, I argued that menopause support in the workplace is critical.

Menopause *typically* falls at the same age bracket as we see staff make decisions about retirement.

The average age in England is 51 years.<sup>2</sup> Addressing this as part of our

We could also achieve something across the NHS that we should be doing as a wider society – we could prepare the workforce to maximise their wellbeing proactively, much earlier than responding to symptoms when it appears.

We await a national workforce strategy to address the well reported workforce attrition and retention gaps<sup>3</sup>.

*Whilst we know there are multiple aspects to attracting and retaining staff, why not start with menopause support...*

However, post COVID we now not only have these issues, we have long COVID, we

recruitment and retention strategy could help on a number of aspects, not least the recognition for staff that they are 'seen'.

Specific support could see greater awareness and a change of culture; accepting this as a hormonal issue as opposed to an issue attached to age or gender.

have working patterns and expectations that are forever changed and apprehension for some staff in a potential *return to the office* request.

We also have recent media reports to increase awareness of menopause which have encouraged the taboo to be lifted, emphasised the struggle for many

<sup>1</sup> ["The menopause revolution will bring an end to women's suffering" – Carolyn Harris MP forms new All-Party Parliamentary Group on Menopause](#)

<sup>2</sup> [+British Menopause Society average age of menopause - Bing video](#)

<sup>3</sup> [NHS workforce: our position | The King's Fund \(kingsfund.org.uk\)](#)

and underlined this as an element to be considered within the protected characteristics framework of the Equality Act 2010<sup>4</sup>.

*Menopause support is not an optional extra and unless we do something we risk experience and organisational knowledge lost as staff who are struggling with symptoms decide to leave, or worse, feel they have no option.*

Although (mainly) a natural process for anyone without a surgical/medically induced menopause, and a number of people will not experience symptoms, as many as 25% will report significant symptoms that they describe as 'debilitating'<sup>5</sup>.

This chimes with the lived experience I hear across England as a network Chair.

Although we do not consistently monitor exit interview feedback, I hear directly

what drives staff to reduce their hours, reconsider promotion opportunities or even leave the NHS and take their experience with them on a daily basis.

Consider just one aspect; of 34 most common symptoms, problems with sleep is high on the list<sup>6</sup>.

Lack of sleep can exacerbate other physical and mental health issues sometimes such as increased anxiety reported in as many as 63%<sup>7</sup>.

After a sustained period of disturbed or even worse, total lack of sleep leading to increased anxiety, concentration issues, brain fog and perhaps imposter syndrome as a result – we can see a huge impact for that individual.

Added to this, not all staff have the facility for flexible working, a GP confident to offer specific interventions, access to specialist support and awareness from colleagues and line managers.

---

**W**hilst we know there are multiple aspects to attracting and retaining staff, why not start with menopause support; it's a thread we can pick at, it crosses nearly 80% of the workforce.

**Almost 50% of staff are recorded as 45 years or over<sup>8</sup> and analysis of local age profiles could indicate that reliance on the staff most likely affected is even greater.**

26 May 2022

---

<sup>4</sup> [Menopause and the law: Menopause at work - Acas](#)

<sup>5</sup> [FACTS – menopausesupport.co.uk](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Menopause - Symptoms - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Download.ashx \(fawcettsociety.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Age in the NHS infographic | NHS Employers](#)

