BVNA – Menopause Blog

As a director of a practice that is predominantly staffed by women (as is often the case in our industry) and as I enter a certain stage in my life, I recognise the importance of supporting the women in our workplace.

For me, my perception of the menopause was simply that you got night sweats and that your periods stopped. I had no idea that peri menopause can start up to 10 years prior to the menopause, nor was I aware of all the other symptoms that go alongside this. Signs include memory loss, brain fog, exhaustion, mood swings and feelings of inadequacy or not being as sharp as you used to be. The list is extensive, and these are just a few that have affected me.

It seems crazy to me that there is limited support out there and that as an employer I was completely unaware of the battle a lot of my staff are facing. It is just something that we don’t talk about – but why not? I think from my experience a lot of people don’t talk about it because it isn’t something that we highlight. They don’t feel comfortable speaking out, because it is natural process that we go through, and we just have to cope with it. It is something that as women we go through just like we did with puberty, and we just don’t feel comfortable talking about it!

For me this absolutely has to change. I fully appreciate that for many this may still be a private process; they may not want to discuss it with anyone and everyone and that’s understandable. However, we need to be creating a culture within our practices whereby we discuss the menopause and create more awareness. We need to support and educate each other – many of us don’t actually recognise the symptoms we have as those of peri menopause. We need to adapt our workplace for our staff, in the same way we do for pregnant colleagues or those that have a chronic health condition. We need to look at how and where they work, look at the ventilation, uniform adaptions, access to cold water and ensuring the breaks we have are adequate. We need to make this the norm! We should allow our managers and supervisors appropriate training on how to support their team members. If the affected staff member is comfortable, we can then allow colleagues to understand the adaptions that need to be made. Making these alterations should help reduce staff absence, as those affected will know you are doing all you can to ensure that remain a valued part of the team.

One of the most important things to remember is that everyone’s experience and symptoms are different, so above all LISTEN and HEAR what you are being told. Make sure that any adaptions made are individual, and you are not just trying to fit everyone into the same box.

If you have an inclusive culture, and don’t shy away from discussing topics that may have previously been a taboo subject, then this will engage your team. They will feel supported, hopefully find you approachable and allow for you to make the changes needed to support them during their working day. It must be done properly; it should never be a tick box exercise, and everyone needs to play their part. I feel that putting in place a menopause policy and further protocols is a great start but that educating your staff is key to ensuring that the policy is followed.

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