

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
House of Commons
London
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20.01.20

Dear Matt

I am writing to you in your capacity as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Due to my own poor menopause experience and search for factual, evidence based information I came across menopausesupport.co.uk founded by Diane Danzebrink and have found the help and support I was looking for, particularly amongst the associated private Facebook community The Menopause Support Network.

Diane launched the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign in Westminster with cross party support in October 2018; the campaign currently has over 100,000 signatures and is urging your government to improve menopause education for health care practitioners and for menopause guidance to be introduced into every workplace. The aim of having menopause included in the new RSE curriculum was achieved in July 2019.

As a result of the campaign I have become aware of the thousands of women who are affected by a lack of education, information, advice and support. As menopause is a life stage that every woman will experience and three out of four will have symptoms it is simply common sense to make this a priority as women are currently losing personal health, relationships, jobs and even lives. The highest rate of suicide for women is in those between the ages of 45-49, when most will be in peri menopause.

I would like to know what steps you will be taking in regard to the following;

It is, quite frankly, disgraceful that menopause is not taught as a mandatory module of education for all health care professionals and this is currently costing not only women and their families but also the NHS due to the many repeat appointments and needless secondary referrals being made when menopause is not recognised. Women are regularly dismissed or incorrectly diagnosed as anxious or depressed and prescribed anti depressants which is not first line treatment for menopause as a direct result of this lack of education.

I would like to know what plans you have to engage with the Royal College of GPs and the universities teaching the relevant curriculum to ask them to include menopause as a mandatory module and how you plan to ensure that all GPs currently practising update their knowledge and work to the standards set out in the current NICE guidelines?

The ongoing HRT shortages are causing a great deal of distress for the many thousands of women no longer able to access their medication and whilst there are some alternatives available they are

neither suitable nor effective for everyone. The lack of information from your department has only added to the distress and women have been left to fend for themselves, with some being told to go 'cold turkey' by their doctors who don't know how to prescribe possible alternatives or what to offer.

When do you plan to share an update on the HRT crisis with the women of this country who are desperate for information?

We currently have approximately fifty NHS menopause clinics throughout the U.K, the majority only operate for one half day per week. Due to funding cuts many of these clinics have closed their doors permanently and waiting lists at those that do operate are often in excess of three months. Women are being forced to seek consultations with private menopause specialists as a result of the lack of GP education and the length of waiting lists. Many of those women are in no financial position to be able to afford these consultations with some borrowing money from family or putting the cost on credit cards, which is simply unacceptable.

What do you plan to do to improve access to specialist menopause clinics for those that need them?

One of the unspoken symptoms of menopause is genitourinary syndrome or vaginal atrophy; this is poorly recognised and often misdiagnosed as thrush. The medications prescribed will not treat the symptoms which need ongoing management. There are currently thousands of elderly women in care homes who live with the pain of GSM every day and the associated recurrent urinary tract infections without the right treatment and care.

How do you plan to ensure that women receive the right information and care at the appropriate time to ensure that this dreadful state of affairs is not allowed to continue and how do you plan to ensure that care home owners and staff are educated about this debilitating condition which will affect 70-80% of women as they age?

Finally, all the points that I have raised above cost our NHS in so many different ways, surely it is just common sense to improve menopause education for all health care practitioners and to instigate a system similar to the notifications for breast cancer and cervical screening which would mean that every woman received an information booklet about menopause at the age of forty to ensure that she is fully educated and able to make informed choices when the time is right.

When will this simple, cost effective solution be introduced?

Surely it is time to take the appropriate steps to demand that women receive the appropriate care that they deserve but also to ensure that we stop wasting precious NHS resources.

Surely it is time for you, your department and this government to #MakeMenopauseMatter

I look forward to your reply

Yours Sincerely