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Menopause Support Survey Reveals Shocking Disparity in Menopause training in medical schools.

41% of UK universities do not have mandatory menopause education on the curriculum.

This staggering result comes from a Freedom of Information (FOI) request put to the UK's 33 medical schools by founder of the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign Diane Danzebrink.

Menopause campaigner Diane Danzebrink has been calling for mandatory menopause education for all GPs since 2015 when she started speaking out to raise awareness of the needless suffering that so many women experience during menopause due to the lack of GP knowledge. Diane's own experience of surgical menopause took her very close to taking her own life and she is determined that she will improve things for the future.

Diane's not for profit organisation Menopause Support asked medical schools:

- what they taught about menopause and HRT
- how much time was spent on it
- if it was mandatory and
- how it was taught.

Despite the fact that there are approximately 13 million perimenopausal or post menopausal women in the UK, almost half – a staggering 41% did not have a mandatory menopause education program for their students. This means some doctors may leave university with absolutely no education in menopause at all.

Many universities said they expected their students to gain menopause education whilst on GP training placements.

"This is a risky practice," Diane says. "It relies entirely on whether the GP trainer is knowledgeable about menopause and HRT and is following up-to-date NICE menopause guidance and advice. Unfortunately, many have little or no formal menopause education and are not familiar with current guidance."

Members of Diane's 18,500 strong menopause support community group and women more widely on social media repeatedly say they are denied treatment even though HRT is the first line recommended treatment under NICE guidelines.

"Many women say they are turned away by their doctor, denied treatment for debilitating symptoms when they are not recognised as being connected to menopause and incorrectly offered antidepressants rather than first line treatment which is HRT."

Diane, whose ongoing lobbying has managed to ensure that is now on the secondary school education curriculum in England, says women are being failed by their doctors simply because of the lack of adequate education in menopause and is calling for:

- mandatory and standardised education across universities
- mandatory, standardised training for GP trainees
- mandatory catch-up CPD courses for GPs.

“It is time for all those involved with GP training to acknowledge that there is a problem and that the curriculum and menopause training for GPs currently in practice needs to be urgently addressed to solve this. Surely it is just common sense for all medical students and every trainee GP to study the same mandatory menopause module during their training and for all current GPs to be updated to ensure that they can help half of the population.”

“This would save time for the individual doctor and money for the NHS, most importantly it would stop the needless suffering of so many women who are still not getting the help that they deserve which can have both short-and-long term effects on their physical and mental health and devastating effects on all aspects of their lives including their relationships and careers.”

It is no coincidence that the suicide rates are highest for women between the ages of 45-54 the average perimenopause and early post-menopausal years.

“Women deserve better.”

In repeated attempts to engage the Royal College of General Practitioners on this subject since 2016 Diane Danzebrink has consistently been advised that menopause is on the curriculum but when pressing for further details the college have always advised that they have no involvement in the setting of the curricula.

In 2016 the RCGP Postgraduate Training and Curriculum Coordinator wrote

‘I would like to take this opportunity to clarify that although the RCGP sets the training curriculum and examinations for doctors entering general practice, which includes knowledge and skills relating to the menopause, we do not deliver or approve the training programmes nor oversee the supervision of the trainees. The relevant body responsible for these aspects of training in England is Health Education England.’

In 2020 RCGP chair Martin Marshall stated that

“Menopause is already included in the GP curriculum, which all GP trainees must demonstrate competence of in order to practise. “Mandatory training courses for some conditions and not others would be unworkable.”

Diane says “Whilst menopause may now have been added to the curriculum our survey clearly shows that it is certainly not mandatory and the inconsistent quality, quantity, depth and breadth of the information available to students will continue to result in a postcode lottery for women which is unacceptable. It also raises questions about the RCGP

examination process if those with little or no menopause education can meet the current examination criteria.”

About the FOI request:

On the 2nd November 2020 Menopause Support, the not for profit organisation that Diane founded, sent an FOI request to 33 medical schools in the UK.

It has taken six months to receive all the responses with many universities sighting Covid as the cause of the delays in replying.

Menopause Support asked 4 questions.

1. Is teaching about menopause included in the curriculum? If so, is it mandatory or optional?
2. How much time is dedicated to teaching about menopause?
3. How is teaching delivered? E.g. lecture, seminar, placements?
4. What are medical students taught about the menopause and treatment options including about Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

- Of the 33 Universities that we sent requests to only 19 of those confirmed that Menopause was a mandatory part of the curriculum. One course is in its infancy so was unable to offer answers to the questions so was discounted from the calculation hence 32/19 (41%)
- Plymouth and Leicester Universities claim not to hold the answers to the questions in the necessary format so didn't send any responses.
- Many expect their students to gain their menopause education whilst on GP Placement. This relies entirely on whether the GP trainer is knowledgeable about menopause and HRT and is following up to date NICE menopause guidance and advice. Anecdotal evidence from 18,500 members of the menopause support community and women in general would suggest that this is very often not the case. Many, surveys say over 60%, are still offered antidepressants rather than first line treatment which is HRT.
- Self-directed learning also seems popular and relies entirely on the individual student's level of interest in the subject. E.g. *'not mandatory but students are expected to engage'* Newcastle Uni.
- Some universities expect their students to encounter opportunities for menopause education during obs and gynae placement. This is highly unlikely as there are very few dedicated menopause clinics around the country and those that do exist often only operate for half or one day per week/month.

- Where lectures are delivered they vary from 1-hour, taught by 7 universities, to Birmingham University who spend 8 hours on the subject and Edinburgh around 10 in total.
- Kings College London state that they take menopause education very seriously and have 3 British Menopause Society Specialists in their faculty who run clinics however, students are *'welcome to sit in on them'* which seems a missed opportunity. It is worth mentioning that Kings have one of the highest rates of graduates choosing Women's Health as a career and they also were keen to add that *'they are aware that their Guide for Women's Health Block needs updating to reflect recent changes to practice with publications that have indicated a change to risk of HRT and more awareness of the impact on women of menopausal age in the workplace'* They said they were grateful for the FOI request as it is *'focusing our thoughts to include this in our guide'* (currently being rewritten since Leila Frodsham took up post and the GMC changes to learning objectives across ALL medical schools)
- Glasgow University told us that they teach the physiology of menopause, symptoms, long term consequences, premature menopause, HRT-modes of administration, sequential, continuous and combined, risks and benefits of HRT, alternative therapies, OTC remedies, POM options, CBT, lifestyle modifications. They claim that all this content is delivered in a one hour session.
- Swansea University claim to teach the following in a maximum of 2 hours- a) Define menopause b) Explain the aetiology/risk factors of menopause c) Recognise the presenting symptoms of menopause d) Recognise the signs and symptoms of menopause on physical examination e) Describe the gross structure of the breast, its blood supply and changes with menopause f) Summarise epidemiology of menopause g) Summarise the prognosis for patients with menopause h) Identify appropriate investigations for menopause and interpret the results i) Generate a management plan for menopause j) Identify the possible complications for menopause and its management k) Classify and differentiate the causes of post meno bleeding l) Recall the initial investigation and management of post meno bleeding.
- Oxford University invite women experiencing menopause and other menstrual conditions to discuss their symptoms with small groups of students.

Notes to editors:

Diane Danzebrink is a menopause counsellor and founder of Menopause Support (menopausesupport.co.uk) and the #MakeMenopauseMatter campaign which currently has over 134,000 supporters and has been instrumental in ensuring that menopause has been added to the secondary school curriculum in England. The campaign is calling for mandatory menopause training for all GPs and menopause guidance in every workplace and has been featured in several national newspapers and magazines.

Diane has been a popular guest with the media including being interviewed on This Morning, Good Morning Britain, BBC Breakfast, ITV News, Sky News, Lorraine, Woman's Hour, Victoria Derbyshire and BBC Radio 5 Live to name but a few. She has also been invited to speak on many local radio stations and to offer advice to listeners during phone-ins.

Diane is passionate about menopause and mental health and has written for the Telegraph and the Guardian, has contributed to several books and is currently writing her first book.

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