

Minister for Public Health and Women's Health submission of 1 May 2023

PE2012/A: Remove need for follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) blood tests before prescribing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Thank you for your email of 4 April 2023 inviting me to respond to the above petition.

Firstly, it is important to be clear that any decision about the best treatment for an individual patient is a clinical one, determined by a range of factors and is rightly for the professional judgement of clinicians to make, taking into account the patient's condition, medical history and personal preference. It is not appropriate for the Scottish Government to comment on or seek to influence clinical practice.

Diagnosis of Menopause and Perimenopause

Diagnosis of perimenopause or menopause in women over the age of 45 can be done without any form of testing based on presentation of symptoms alone and a blood test is not recommended in this age group.

For women aged 40-45, the [NICE menopause guidance](#) states that HRT can be offered without the need for a blood test when other menopausal symptoms are present, such as a change in menstrual cycle and vasomotor symptoms (hot flushes). **The use of FSH blood tests is not therefore a requirement for diagnosis in this age group** but can be considered in conjunction with other factors and can be helpful to confirm a suspected diagnosis of perimenopause or menopause. This view is supported by the [British Menopause Society](#).

Women under 45 can sometimes present with symptoms which may not necessarily be menopause related or, they have some symptoms usually associated with menopause but a completely normal menstrual cycle. In these circumstances a blood test may be taken in order to rule out other conditions before prescribing HRT.

However, the results of a blood test are not taken in isolation because levels of FSH can fluctuate significantly throughout a person's cycle. In

addition, if a woman is taking the contraceptive pill then an FSH blood test is not valid. A clinician will therefore look at a combination of factors such as medical history and presenting symptoms along with the results of a blood test before making a diagnosis.

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI), is defined as menopause before the age of 40. A blood test in this situation is recommended to confirm the diagnosis and to rule out possible correctable causes such as high prolactin or thyroid problems.

Training for GPs

We are aware that women do not always feel that they get the support they need when seeking help for menopause symptoms. Through the delivery of the [Women's Health Plan](#) we want to ensure that all women have timely access to menopause support and services when required, be that through primary or specialist care.

We are taking action to build understanding of menopause among all healthcare professionals. This includes access to training on menopause, including awareness of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause, the intermediate and long-term consequences of menopause, and knowing where to signpost women for consistent advice and support. We have commissioned NHS Education for Scotland (NES) to create a bespoke training package and framework focussed on menopause, including perimenopause, and menstrual health for GPs and healthcare providers across Primary Care.

Access to Specialist Menopause Support

Most women will be able to manage their menopause symptoms with support when they need it from their GP and primary care team. However, it is important that women who do need it have improved access to specialist services for advice and support on the diagnosis and management of menopause. This is why one of the key aims of the Women's Health Plan is to 'Ensure women who need it have access to specialist menopause services for advice and support on the diagnosis and management of menopause.'

There is now a specialist menopause service in every mainland NHS Health Board, with a 'buddy system' in place for Island Health Boards.

We have also established a Menopause Specialists Network which meets regularly and supports primary care teams by providing access to a menopause specialist for consistent advice, support, onward referral, leadership and training.

Access to Information – NHS Inform

It is important that women have access to clear and accurate information about the menopause. Improving the information available to them can help them feel more confident about what to expect, what's 'normal', the options available to them and, importantly, to know that they are not alone.

There is a comprehensive resource on the menopause as part of the Women's Health Platform on [NHS inform](#). The platform is a comprehensive resource including 'myth busting' films to help address some of the myths around menopause, information on symptoms, premature menopause, options for care, treatment and support and much more. It also includes a film about talking to your GP which can help facilitate better conversations when women seek support from their GP. The platform aims to help women find the information they need on a range of different health issues.

I hope you find the information contained in this response helpful in your consideration of the petition.

Yours sincerely,

Jenni Minto MSP

Minister for Public Health and Women's Health