

Petitioner submission of 4 May 2023

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

In Scotland, roughly 400,000 women are currently of menopausal age. It is stated this happens between 45-55, the average being 51. What does that word menopause actually mean? It actually refers to one day in time. That day is 365 days after a woman's last period. What isn't taken into consideration by GPs across Scotland is the time leading up to that one day – Perimenopause.

Perimenopause can last anywhere from a few months to 10 years. During that time, many of the symptoms begin and sadly for many, these symptoms are debilitating. So why is this period of time being ignored and dismissed by doctors? Why are women being left to suffer?

I bring my petition to your attention in order to make change. To help the women who need the correct care and support during this natural transition. To ensure doctors are getting the right training and following the proper guidelines.

Symptoms

Perimenopause/menopause symptoms vary. Some women don't get any, but many women get a wide variety of symptoms. Irregular periods, palpitations, hot flushes, night sweats, low mood, anxiety, joint and muscle pain, headaches and mood swings. These are just a few. There are at least 35 recognised symptoms. They affect every aspect of a woman's life – relationships and work are the two main areas.

I spoke to two women who are experiencing Perimenopause symptoms. This is what they have to say.

Person A (42) – I have been experiencing symptoms for a few years now. My periods stopped four months ago. Every day I battle against physical and psychological symptoms. I have had suicidal thoughts. I have been bedridden from the joint pain. I approached my doctor after yet another visit to A&E, worried I was having a heart attack as my heart was racing and I felt weak. The consultant told me to discuss menopause with my GP as he believes that's

what is causing all the symptoms. Other things such as deficiencies, electrolyte imbalances and other common causes have been ruled out. My GP told me I was too young. Instead, he prescribed sertraline and referred me to psychiatry and occupational therapy Community Mental Health Team(CMHT). They can't help me as it's hormone related and referred me back to my GP. My husband and children are seeing me fall apart every single day. My doctor is telling me to take the sertraline. CMHT told me that won't help. I feel let down.

Person B (41) – I have been to my doctor many times for perimenopause. At first, they told me there is no possible way that I can be menopausal. They handed me antidepressants. It took months of fighting to get them to listen. They promised me a referral to the menopause clinic. I was happy with that until I found out the referral wasn't made. I've been left to it.

There are many similar stories across the country. Social media support groups are filled with women desperate for help because their doctors won't listen. Why is this allowed to happen?

NICE guidelines V Local Guidelines.

During my research, it has come to my attention that many health boards have different guidelines when it comes to diagnosing and treating menopause. Those seem to differ from the NICE guidelines that are there to ensure safe practice and to also ensure patient care. So why the differing approaches?

[NICE guidance](#) states in women between 40-45, doctors should consider using the FSH test. Consider. It does not state this is mandatory. It also states symptoms should be discussed and the GP should give all the relevant information regarding menopause and treatments. This is where Scots are being failed.

NHS Lanarkshire, for example, state in [their guidelines](#) the FSH blood test must be carried out in women aged between 40-45. If the levels are over 30, menopause is diagnosed. The issue arises when levels are under 30. NHS Lanarkshire state if a woman's hormone levels are under 30, which is classed as normal, then it is not menopause. This is incorrect. The test is being used as the sole diagnostic tool. The doctor should also look at the symptoms a woman is experiencing.

Yes, it is important to rule out other possible causes, however, the FSH test is not reliable as during perimenopause, hormone levels fluctuate constantly. They could be normal at the moment the test is carried out, but they could be higher or lower an hour later. The blood test is snapshot of a very small moment of time. The use of this test in diagnosing must be changed and rules fully adhered to.

Another guideline not being followed is that antidepressants should not be given as a first line treatment in women presenting with menopause symptoms. Yet doctors continue to use these before anything else.

Psychological Symptoms

Anxiety and Depression are two of the symptoms caused by a change in oestrogen and progesterone levels. They are two common symptoms, yet doctors are handing out antidepressants and are not looking at the whole picture.

It is stated in NICE guidelines that antidepressants should not be given as a first line treatment in women presenting with menopause symptoms. The reason for this is simple, they do not work. Psychological symptoms caused by menopause are not due to changes in serotonin, for example. They are caused by the drop in reproductive hormones. Why are doctors not wise to this?

Their lack of knowledge has a massive impact on women's mental health and adds to the psychological distress. It is such attitudes that lead women to take their own lives because they can no longer cope without the relevant treatment and support.

Better Training Needed

GPs are not required to carry out training on menopause. The doctors who do agree to take it on, are only getting between 20-60 minutes. How is this acceptable? That is not much at all and with so much new information out there, they are hardly touching the surface.

Menopause training should start in medical school and then yearly mandatory training throughout their career.

I ask the Parliament to take on board everything written in this document. Menopause will affect your loved ones. Women are constantly being failed, dismissed, and made to feel their health does

not matter. Something needs to change as women's lives are on the line.

Thank you for considering the petition and the evidence provided.