DR SUZANNE BROWN

SUPPORTING COLLEAGUES AND TRAINEES REGARDING THEIR COMMUNICATIONS AROUND (PERI)MENOPAUSE

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SESSION PLAN

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- Dr Suzanne Brown introduction
- 01 What is menopause?
- 02. Teaching and menopause
- 03. Flexible working and the menopause
- 04. Supporting colleagues and trainees

MISSION STATEMENT

- I believe in making schools better places to work through inclusive, empathetic and supportive working practices
- Making teaching an attractive career for people at different stages of life, and schools a place where people want to work and stay working.
- This is the umbrella under which my research interests around teacher retention sit.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- **Supporting colleagues to thrive during (peri) menopause- on my email signature if you wish to explore further**

- Brown, S. (2025) Making the grass greener for teachers – Sheffield Institute of Education

  Brown, S. (2025) Thought piece- flexible working at all stages of career. https://www.flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/admin-user/includes/download-resource.php?id=166

  Brown. S. (2024) Teaching, flexible working and menopause
  https://www.flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/

  Brown. S. (2024) Flexible Working and the menopause
  https://www.flexibleworkingineducation.co.uk/

  Brown. S (2023) Where are the part-time women teachers in senior school leadership: inequalities, tensions and timescapes ?" *Educational Management Administration & Leadership.*
  https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17411432231219679

  Brown, S. (2023). Part-time women teachers- having it all? In Marsh-Davies, K., & Burnett, C. (Eds.) *Teachers and teaching Post Covid: Seizing Opportunities for Change*. (First). Routledge

  Marsh-Davies, K., & Brown, S. (2023). A catalyst for change? In Marsh-Davies, K., & Burnett, C. (Eds.) *Teachers and teaching Post Covid: Seizing Opportunities for Change*. (First). Routledge



WHAT IS (PERI) MENOPAUSE?

More than one day in time

In the UK the average age of menopause, which is the cessation of menstrual periods, is 51 years old.

Menopause is one day in time between being peri-menopausal and post- menopausal.

Perimenopause can begin up to 10 years before menopause and being post-menopausal is for the rest of life. This stage is perhaps overlooked and is something we should be mindful of when supporting people as hormonal fluctuations are more extreme

It is important to acknowledge that menopause can be undergone by trans and non-binary people.

Furthermore, it can occur at any time following the start of periods, naturally or due to surgical/medical interventions.

More than just stopping periods

Perimenopausal symptoms are wide-ranging to both physical and mental health, more are being recognised with time. Peri-menopause is something we should be aware of when working with colleagues

- Heavy bleeding
- Hot flushes
- Joint pain
- Gut problems
- Anxiety
- Problems with memory
- 'Brain fog'
- Loss of confidence
- Poor sleep

CONTEXT (stats correct at time of delivery)

- 10% of people leave their jobs due to difficulty managing menopausal symptoms (Bazely, Marren and Shepherd, 2022). This is particularly pertinent in relation to teachers:
- Around 75% of the teaching workforce are female, more in primary (86%) than secondary (65%) (Gov.uk, 2023a)
- 61% of teachers are aged 30-49. (ibid)
- The proportion of teachers aged 50-59 is increasing (17%) and the proportion of younger teachers is decreasing. (ibid)
- In the early 1900s, the average age of menopause was 47 and the life expectancy for women was 49. Today the average age of menopause is 51 and life expectancy for a women is in her eighties (Henpicked, 2025)
- This means a lot of females are working and living longer (30 years/ third of their lives) post menopause.
- Managing and ‘getting on with it’ is not the answer, thriving is what we should be striving for!



TEACHING AND MENOPAUSE

- Belinda Steffan and Kristina Potocnik, Teaching through the menopause: A flexible work paradox, 2023

TEACHING AND MENOPAUSE- IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION

Gendered ageism in schools resulted in participants not wishing to speak about the menopause in case they were regarded as being old and judged by younger and/or male colleagues.

They found that women who are able to ask for help, support and work-placed adjustments do better in managing the menopause because they feel psychologically safe.

Despite teachers reporting that they were better able to manage their symptoms during Covid, due to easier access to toilet, changing facilities and more sleep (no commute), a lack of flexibility in teaching in the pre and post-covid eras is a barrier.

RECENT FINDINGS SCHOOL AND COLLEGE VOICE, DFE, APRIL 2024)

- Most common impacts amongst teachers were anxiety, memory loss, and a lack of confidence in their abilities
- Only 1 in 4 of those who had experienced symptoms affecting their ability to do their job had spoken to their line manager. The majority did not intend to do so.
- 52% did not know if their school had a menopause policy
- The most useful workplace adjustments were temperature control and mental health support
- The adjustment most would find most useful was flexible working (28%), staff training on the menopause (13%), others were included.

What other flexibilities can be adopted to support teachers to have a healthy menopause transition? (Steffan and Potocnik, 2023)

- Occupational health campaigns
- Policy or guidance on the menopause
- Late starts for those having difficulty sleeping
- Being able to take breaks when needed
- Working in rooms where the temperature can be effectively regulated
- A flexible dress code
- Clean and well-resourced toilets and changing facilities
- Access to drinking water
- Manageable workload

RECENT LEGISLATION

- "If menopause symptoms have a long and substantial impact on- a woman's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, these symptoms should be considered a disability. If menopause symptoms amount to a disability, an employer will be under a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments. Women experiencing menopause symptoms may also be protected from direct and indirect discrimination, as well harassment and victimisation, on the grounds of sex and age."

- Equality and Human Rights Commission

  February 2024

There have already been cases successfully taken to court hence there are financial implications for employers too.

DISCUSSION

- How can we support (individually and more widely within the workplace)

a) colleagues and

b) trainees in their communications around (peri) menopause in the workplace?

- Things to consider perhaps: education, psychological safety, inclusivity, empathy, adjustments

- How will you change your professional practice in your practice in light of your discussions? Please be prepared to feedback to the group



FLEXIBLE WORKING AND THE MENOPAUSE

FLEXIBLE WORKING LEGISLATION

- Flexible working is now a common expectation in many sectors, particularly amongst young graduates- and teaching is competing for them

- The Employment Rights Bill will strengthen 'Day 1' right for all employees to request flexible working legislation (April, 2024) by requiring employers to explain the grounds on which they denied a request.

Key benefits

- - retaining experienced staff
- - recruiting from a broader pool of teachers
- - promoting wellbeing
- - improving work-life balance
- - improving productivity and reducing absences
- - promoting equality of opportunity and diversity

Key benefits (cont)

- Offering flexible working arrangements can help to ensure that teaching suits employees at different stages of their lives, such as:
- carers;
- phased retirement;
- career returners;
- combining work with professional development, outside interests;

DISCUSSION

- How do we support the school leaders of the future to be more supportive of flexible working in schools?

- How will your professional practice change in light of your discussions?
- Please be prepared to feedback to the group

Conclusions – What we must do!

- Increase awareness and create environments where menopause can be openly discussed.
- Promote flexible working options, which might help manage menopause symptoms and recruit/retain teaching staff.
- Be prepared - There will soon be a wave of people for whom working later will become the norm due to rises in NPA.
- Research (IFF, 2021) has shown that the majority of school leaders surveyed considered flexible working had a positive impact on teacher health and wellbeing, teacher retention and diversity in the workforce.
- Let's show teachers we care about them and their welfare and encourage them to want to stay in this great profession!

Thank you and Q and A