

APPG on Menopause
Inquiry into the Impact of Menopause
Session 6: Improving awareness, understanding and education, around Menopause

Date: Wednesday 9th February

Time: 13:30 – 15:00

Location: Virtual, Zoom

Minutes taken by: Tamsin Melville, DGA Interel

Members Present:

- Carolyn Harris MP - Chair of APPG
- Peter Dowd MP
- Nikki Aiken MP

Guest Speakers:

- Maria Lyle, Director, RAF Families Federation
- Lisa Nicholls, Fair Treatment for Women in Wales (FTWW)
- Lucy Russell, National Education Union (NEU)
- Mary Bailey, National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC)
- Lisa Winward, Chief Constable, North Yorkshire Police

External Guests:

- Jo Lloyd, Office of Carolyn Harris MP
- Tom Cains, Office of Carolyn Harris MP
- Monica, Office of Caroline Ansel MP
- Clair D-R
- F Berry
- Yuko Parker, NHK (Japanese Broadcasting Corporation)
- Katherine Morgan – DGA Interel
- Sarina Kiayani – DGA Interel
- Victoria McNish – DGA Interel
- Tamsin Melville- DGA Interel

Minutes of the Meeting

Carolyn Harris MP: welcomed everyone and introduced the meeting. She then went on to introduce the guest speakers, inviting them to speak.

Maria Lyle: introduced herself as the Director of the RAF Families Federation and added that it was her role to represent serving personnel and their families. She stated that she gave evidence last year on the select committee enquiry on women in the armed forces, as part of that was around healthcare and wellbeing. In the three-armed forces only 6.6 percent in senior roles are held by women. She wished to discuss later what that means for women in menopause.

Lisa Nicholls: stated that she is a volunteer and menopause campaigner and works in the third sector organisation known as Fair treatment of women in Wales (FTWW). She explained that the FTWW is a patient led organisation and aims to work closely with NHS

Wales. Their role is looking at how they can improve and better support women. Her specific role is to improve healthcare for women who need support or care throughout their menopause. She works with other partner organisations, such as user led groups.

Lucy Russell: stated she works as a gender specialist for the NEU which is the largest trade union for education in Europe and they represent 460,000 members across the UK. Their vision for education is one of social justice. They work to produce research and policy around period inequality and sex education. She went on to say that sexual education is something where menopause education is expected to be delivered. She stated that there are barriers to menopause education. The NEU has also produced work around sexual harassment in schools, and they have produced a report to identify those problems. Their solution was a whole school approach to gender equality, and she states that a whole school approach to menopause must be about school atmosphere and attitudes to menopause. They have produced a tool kit, which she believes is an interesting way of approaching menopause.

Mary Bailey: introduced herself as part of North Yorkshire Police and has a strategic role in supporting Lisa Winward and her women's health portfolio. They have a menopause action group which purpose is to share good practice.

Lisa Winward: introduced herself as Chief Constable in North Yorkshire Police. She stated menopause was a taboo subject until about 10 years ago. In March last year, there were 43,763 female police officers across 43 police forces in England and Wales. They believe 30% of their workforce are at the age where they are being affected by menopause. Around 46% Police Community Support Officers are female and, as more women join the service, this will be a larger issue for policing. Their mission is to help line managers, especially males, who don't know how to speak with staff about menopause. Lisa also mentioned the Equality Act, as menopause symptoms are not often recognised under the act and therefore some female staff and officers are not given the same flexibilities as others who use the equality act.

Carolyn Harris: thanked the speakers for their contribution and introduced the members of parliament who were present. She stated the work on menopause is about awareness raising and giving women the confidence to realise they are not on their own. Carolyn explained the more menopausal experiences are shared, the more women will feel comfortable to come forward and managers will feel comfortable to talk about menopause in the workplace. She then opened up the floor to colleagues.

Peter Dowd: stated that menopause is linked to education and schools. He asked questions to get a better understanding of the current education on menopause in schools.

Lucy Russell: stated Relationships and Sex Education in schools became statutory in 2016. In secondary guidance there is guidance on intimate relationships, and she added that young people should be educated to understand fertility which includes menopause. While Biology education does include fertility, but there isn't that fine detail on the menopause. The statutory guidance came just before covid hit. She couldn't find evidence on whether menopause is educated well enough, but there is good evidence from the Sex Education Forum who found there is a large amount of young people who do not feel they are educated on fertility topics. Therefore, there remains gaps in education.

Peter Dowd: asked if this inclusion goes far enough, and how can more emphasis be put on?

Lucy Russell: stated that there are multiple barriers, especially around stigma and taboos. She referenced period movements in recent years and period poverty as previous examples of this. She believes that there is availability of products, but a lack of education and information as well as stigma and taboos. She went on to state that teachers do not prioritise menopause within the sexual education curriculum as they prioritise menstruation and puberty. There are gaps structurally in teacher training and education, partly due to Covid-19, but also due to a lack of investment in training. She advised more investment in teacher training. She said that this subject needs to be something that teachers specialise in and need the leadership to prioritise. To address stigma and taboos, there is also the question of teacher confidence to deliver the lessons. She said that this APPG is an example of how this topic is the business of everybody and it's important to boost confidence. She spoke of how a lot of teachers feel that they don't know the information about their own body.

Nickie Aiken: stated that there is a massive gap of including menopause in the syllabus and that there is a gap between those in school and those in their 30s. She said that she would like to address this immediate gap. She went on to say that women begin to think about their reproduction when pregnant and she believes it's important for employers to make sure that there is accessible information. She asked what the guests think about supporting women in their 30s and helping them understand what to expect in the next 20 years, as well as their partners?

Lisa Nicholls: said she is part of one of the health implementation groups in Wales. She carried on to say that women who are being called in to have smears, are also being told to have a discussion with their nurses on menopause. She added that women who are having a discussion with doctors and their prescriptions should also receive a couple of lines on the signs and symptoms of menopause. She added that educating women on menopause in their 30s and 40s would be an ideal time.

Lisa Winward: spoke of the National conferences for men and women on menopause. She said they had invited people to these conferences and found people 'don't know what they don't know.' She found that Covid was a benefit because online calls reduce the embarrassment of an in-person event. She added that male supervisors find it difficult to have conversations with women and they had set up Menopause cafes which are just for male colleagues to have a conversation with each other. She affirmed that she would like to make it a more openly discussed topic and for it to not be a taboo topic.

Lucy Russell: congratulated Lisa. She went on to say that the NEU developed a menopause toolkit for members. It is made for leadership management so they are informed on menopause. It should be used as an education tool with practicalities and a poster. It should be a standard policy which can be introduced at a workplace. It also discusses equalities and rights and provides a leadership checklist. People should be owning their commitment to equality, which is why there is a drive on why menopause should be taken seriously and reaching different age groups. She wished to mention a charity named 'Bloody Good Period' as they run workshops for refugees. They found a strong demand for information on menopause, and perimenopause and they also create a safe space to have a conversation.

Maria Lyle: was interested to hear from the Police as it is another uniform body. She spoke of how uniformed personnel in defence have their healthcare provided by the defence medical services not the NHS and she stated that they themselves need to be better trained. She spoke of practitioners who are not equipped to discuss menopause and defence medical practitioners who do not see as many cases of women who are experiencing menopause therefore, they are not educated enough. She wished to take these conversations back to the defence group.

Carolyn Harris: thanked Maria and stated how so few people do not understand what to do about menopause. She went on to say that there are up to 40 symptoms of menopause and 40% of medical schools do not teach menopause. She spoke of how doctors miss the dots and believe that women take up NHS resources, when, in reality, if someone were to join the dots and say that 'it sounds like menopause', then we would save the NHS from these expenses. She spoke of the NHS and how their work force is 40 per cent menopausal women and that they don't do enough regarding the menopause. She said if we were to change the way we thought, taught, and looked at menopause, then we would avoid these issues further down the line. She said if there was a simple factsheet saying what menopause is and what their symptoms are and how they treat it, and if this was made available in schools as a fact sheet, then we wouldn't get kids not understanding it later down the line in their life.

She spoke of the Welsh NHS, putting together a fact sheet and basic communication which will go to every member of staff in the NHS. She then went on to say that if the police or RAF were to utilise and send that to their employers then the amount of good practice would be phenomenal. Within the next year, she said, we need people to join the dots and identify menopause. She described how a factsheet should be given to women at their post-natal exam, smear or every time they have a conversation with a medical practitioner. She then asked how the RAF or Police would feel about being involved in this?

Mary Bailey: agree and stated that it's not as simple as a 'one approach fits all'. They have begun to provide guidance and training and they gathered a whole suit of good practice. They now have National Guidance as well as 'He for She' campaigns, for allies so they have information to support female colleagues. She then said she is happy to share their information.

Carolyn Harris: agreed and thanked her and would like her to share the information they have collected.

Lisa Nicholls: stated that she's been invited to take part on a podcast with Cardiff University medical students to speak about menopause. She then spoke of the potential for other podcasts about the Menopause. She talked about how she was fortunate with her health board in Wales to have a menopause clinic. The menopause specialist nurses run an OAK session - Options, Advise, Knowledge - which involved going out to NHS nurses and speaking about menopause, and offering practice nurses more education on the Menopause. She then continued to speak on the outreach for the podcast and how the medical students can potentially learn.

Carolyn Harris: contributed that, when you go to the doctors and they do your blood pressure and cardiac test, they get a bonus. There is no bonus for women's health. Education is key as women are not joining the dots themselves. She spoke about how if everyone had to persuade their GP to put them on HRT then it is very long process. She said if we give out the information, then we take out the myth and put in the truth.

Lisa Winward: agreed, and thought that there are lots of means to get to people. She said that people have got to be listening when you hand them the leaflet and they need to be engaged as well as have an interaction. She spoke of using every method of interacting and should be handed the leaflet by somebody they trust. She expressed her support of the leaflet. She also noted that they did a doodle/cartoon video, which explains menopause.

Carolyn Harris: would like Lisa to share the video with her so that she can tweet it.

Lisa Nicholls: spoke of meeting general medical services standards as much as they do the other things. They get extra points on the QOF (Quality and Outcomes Frameworks). She said that they need to get menopause and women's health on the QOF standards.

Carolyn Harris: stated that she received emails from serving officers who have been deployed overseas and their wives are at home with menopause. She asked if Lisa and Maria had come across this before.

Lisa Winward: she spoke of when she did their campaign and how men need engagement as well. Most of the men came because their wives were going through menopause, and came to support them rather than their colleagues. She spoke of young people and how their mothers are going through menopause and how it's not just workplace, it's everyone.

Carolyn Harris: asked what basic things can be done in the police force to support those experiencing menopause.

Lisa Winward: spoke of uniform which is designed for men, and that the NPCC is still trying to get clothing suitable for menopausal women. She said the current materials used for the special uniform, make it obvious that they are 'menopause uniform.' She said they need to find uniform suitable for women without making them feel exposed.

Carolyn Harris: asked if there is something that her and Peter Dowd can do, and if that decision is made on a national level.

Lisa Winward: said that there is a National Police Chief Council for uniform procurement.

Carolyn Harris: spoke of Penny Lancaster who was working with men speaking about menopause and said she would be happy to discuss this with the relevant people. She then asked Maria about the RAF.

Maria Lyle: said that uniform is being looked at right now, and that the issue was raised by the Women's and Equality Select Committee. She spoke of uniform having to be comfortable for people in menopause as well as the need for blast vests to be properly fitted. She said women are more subject to injury due to these issues. She spoke to medical practitioners within defence and asked them what support they would like. They said that they would like women's health clinics in areas where there is a concentration of female service people.

Carolyn Harris: asked if the defence medical service also applied to serving partners.

Maria Lyle: said no, as they are usually looked after by NHS however there are military charities which help serving partners. If servicing partners have trouble with menopausal issues, then it depends on the NHS in that area.

However, there are some charities which help partners access specialist care.

Carolyn Harris: said that Peter and herself would like to help on both those issues and said to please give them more information. She then asked if there were any other questions.

Lisa Winward: spoke of the Equality Act struggles, as menopause is not listed under the disability discrimination act (DDA). It is not menopause itself, which is issue but it's the symptoms, as some of the symptoms of menopause would be supported by DDA. That symptom would be part of the DDA and therefore people would be entitled to reasonable adjustments.

Carolyn Harris: understood exactly where she was coming from. However she argued that women shouldn't have to be credited on the Disability Act as it is a basic right and a fact of life.

Peter Dowd agreed with **Carolyn Harris**.

Carolyn Harris: said to Lisa Nicholls that they can discuss developments in Wales with the Welsh Government. She then asked if there was anything people think that we can do as parliamentarians and told them to get in contact if there was. She then thanked everyone for their contributions.