

The time of your life

A website offers nurses the opportunity to learn about women's real experiences of menopause. Mary-Claire Mason reports

Women can feel vulnerable and isolated when they go through the menopause, so Healthtalkonline, a website that collects data and real stories about health-related subjects, has launched a section dedicated to the subject.

The section is aimed at women going through the menopause, their friends and family, and healthcare professionals. It is packed with real case studies and evidence-based information based on qualitative research by the University of Oxford's health experiences research group.

Healthtalkonline and its sister site youthhealthtalk.org are run by the charity DIPEX, which was set up ten years ago by two doctors. Prompted by their own experiences of ill health, Ann McPherson and Andrew Herxheimer felt that patients needed to talk about what they have been through. Personal accounts of more than 50 conditions have been systematically collected.

In the latest section, women use video, audio and text to explain how the menopause has affected them. Its content is based on extensive research about the

menopause and the issues it raises. Social scientist Jenny Hislop, who interviewed the 46 women whose stories appear in the section, explains: 'The aim was to cover a range of experiences, from women who had sailed through the menopause to those seriously affected by it.'

She was struck by the effect the menopause can have on some women's lives, but says women are often reluctant to talk about it because they feel they must be seen to be coping.

The website's section covers 23 topics under seven main headings: the menopause; symptoms; managing symptoms; everyday life and the menopause; relationships with health professionals; advice to friends and family; and information and support.

The section on relationships with health professionals

details women's experiences of dealing with their GPs and menopause specialists, while the managing symptoms pages include information on hormone replacement therapy (HRT), non-HRT and lifestyle options, and complementary therapies.

Jan Brockie, menopause nurse specialist at the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, says nurses can point patients towards the site with confidence.

Peer support

'It offers a wonderful amount of information and support,' she says. 'A woman going through the menopause is likely to find someone there talking about an experience similar to her own.'

The site is also an educational resource for nurses. Ms Brockie suspects that many nurses need to learn more about the menopause.

'It is not a critical illness and does not attract money, but it is something nurses need to know about – after all, half of the population goes through it. With the cutbacks and possible closure of menopause clinics, it is vital that nurses are informed about this important life event' **NS**

Mary-Claire Mason is a freelance writer

For more information go to www.healthtalkonline.org/later_life/menopause

SUMMARY

The Healthtalkonline website has a section to help women going through the menopause.

Keywords

Menopause • Healthtalkonline • Website • Women's stories

GETTY IMAGES