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IN THIS ISSUE:

ROUNDTABLE:

ENGAGING THE DESKLESS WORKFORCE

PREPARING FOR RETIREMENT

BUSINESS REDEFINED

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

SUPPORTING MENOPAUSE

ACUITY

“DESPITE BEING ONE OF THE MOST
REGULATED SECTORS, WORKING IN
PHARMA OFFERS THE UNIQUE POTENTIAL
TO SAVE MILLIONS OF LIVES”

CAROLYNE MALIZIA
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER
ASPIRE PHARMA LTD





ARTICLE BY SIMON FOWLER, CEO - ADVISERPLUS & THE EMPOWERING PEOPLE GROUP

4.06 BILLION REASONS

"UNDERSTANDING MORE HAS SHONE A BRIGHT LIGHT ON THE FACT THAT VALUABLE EMPLOYEES OFTEN LEAVE JOBS, SIMPLY BECAUSE EMPLOYERS AREN'T PAYING ATTENTION"

The reality is, roughly fifty percent of employees will go through menopause or are experiencing it right now. The other fifty percent? They will know people and could do with a better understanding, so they are better equipped to support. Without a shadow of doubt, I needed more knowledge, at the group where I am CEO, 70 percent of employees are female, so there is an even higher percentage rate of individuals impacted by the menopause - or will be.

From a CEO perspective, it's become very clear that many valued team members could consider resigning at some point, because of the severity of their symptoms. A survey* of more than 2,000 working women aged 40-to-60 in late 2023 revealed that 23 percent had considered resigning from their job due to the impact of the menopause and 14 percent said they were planning to hand in their notice. Additionally, working women over the age of 50 are the fastest growing UK demographic, making it clearer that this isn't a 'female' problem, it's a workplace one and it's impacting our people and our businesses. Consider too that ten or so years ago, mental health was a taboo subject, carefully swept - and kept - under the carpet. Menopause is starting a similar journey of awareness, although in the workplace it's still likely

discussed in hushed whispers between trusted colleagues, if at all. But with more awareness and education in society generally, there will be better experiences all round. There is no doubt that business leaders are in a prime position to champion perimenopause and menopause awareness and support. Indeed, the subject came front and centre in my world when my partner started experiencing health issues. It was all too apparent how little I knew and how to best support her. By educating myself, I started understanding what she was going through and also what my mother and other people in my life have no doubt silently gone through. According to GenM, there are 48 different symptoms that may be experienced during perimenopause and menopause - yes, hot flushes, brain fog, tiredness, sweats, but

there are many more. Anxiety, breathing difficulties, hair loss and joint pain to name a few. The process will be unique to individuals, but can range from impacting confidence to feeling some discomfort to experiencing complete debilitation, which unsurprisingly affects performance. The symptoms can start at age 45, although some may experience symptoms earlier, perhaps due to medications or genetic conditions, for example. Some trans and non-binary individuals may also experience symptoms and so people managers need to have an awareness of the diverse impact.

Understanding more has shone a bright light on the fact that valuable employees often leave jobs, simply because employers aren't paying attention. My overall viewpoint on the subject isn't about seeking moral high ground; it's

focused on enhancing employee experiences and business results by addressing these concerns. As employers, we are becoming better at supporting many different life circumstances, but not this one - even though our collective propositions and cultures revolve around our people. Replacing valuable employees who leave is incredibly difficult and costly. For them to leave for a reason that was eminently avoidable is an organisational failure. Menopause is a crucial issue for business leaders due to its significant impact on the bottom line, especially regarding retention and performance. The challenges employees face in managing their symptoms at work can lead to increased absenteeism, presenteeism and decreased engagement. With an estimated 14 million working days lost each year due to menopause, as reported by The Menopause Charity, this is a significant business concern that demands immediate and focused attention. These factors become even more serious considering the real risk of employment tribunals related to menopause and sex discrimination. Employment lawyers at Halborns have reviewed employment tribunal decisions in England and Wales and found a clear, increasing trend in claims citing menopause. There is also a rapidly growing body of case law showing that menopausal symptoms can amount to a disability for employment law purposes.

HR Directors and CPOs are central to helping the C-suite champion this important employee wellbeing cause. The most persuasive way to convince a CEO is to build a strong business case. It's necessary to clearly show how the menopause is impacting your organisation in terms of performance, retention, morale and absence. What percentage of employees are likely to be impacted, now and in the future? Are employees doing a physical job, or a desk based one? Understanding the impact on individuals, teams and the business is also key. Consider too, the legal risks of not making change. And what about employer brand? Will your reputation be positive or negative when it comes to

employee wellbeing and engagement? Another essential HR role is to create a transparent menopause policy as part of the overall wellbeing strategy. This needs to be easily accessible to support individuals, colleagues, line managers and the business generally. A policy could include a jargon explainer, a description of menopause and its symptoms, support available for different symptoms, relevant benefits available to employees, external resources as well as how managers and colleagues can help. It is likely that existing employee benefits can support individuals. Health cash plans, private health plans and Employee Assistance

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Programmes with counselling, particularly ones that support mental health, will likely support employees. This means it doesn't necessarily cost employers more. In this case, it's important to highlight support to employees, signposting options clearly and regularly.

Some process changes may need to be made to better support people, as the work environment - especially if there is lack of air or ventilation - may cause difficulties. Adjustments such as allowing regular short breaks, providing extra or adjustments to uniform, or providing a quiet space, can help. Symptoms such as concentration and memory difficulties could be supported by regular check-ins and recaps. As the symptoms are so broad, so must be the adjustments - managers must be able to individualise plans and think flexibly. It's important to

acknowledge that the business is on a learning curve and that ongoing education is happening all around to make things easier for impacted employees. Genuine two-way conversation is essential. Active listening, perhaps with a staff survey, focus groups or exit surveys will ensure a better understanding of employee needs. These also support an open dialogue and the ability to address the topic, sensitive to building trust and emotional safety. Hosting a Menopause Café for employees, either on site or virtually, demonstrates that the subject is not taboo and that individuals can share their experiences, if they wish, while learning together.

The menopause discussion also needs to be a part of manager training. It is highly likely that damage is being done by managers who aren't aware of the issues and how to handle it. Most line managers will understandably find a conversation about menopause difficult, indeed, they will likely feel a real concern that they could make things worse or awkward by approaching it in the wrong way. They may be concerned too, that even if they have a conversation, they don't know how to provide proper support or create change. The likelihood however is that issues that aren't addressed will fester, increasing the risk that people will leave, or even of claims of failure to make reasonable adjustments. A guide for managers can support here, perhaps explaining how to have the right conversations, why they are important, information about menopause, its symptoms, employee support available, as well as how to handle absence and performance issues. Menopause is indeed a complex subject and needs senior leader champions. It also needs a safe place of conversation and moral support for all. It's time for all CEOs to start paying attention, understanding just how better managing the menopause can make a difference to the bottom line.

REFERENCES

*Survey 2023 - SimplyHealth

FOR FURTHER INFO
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