

Focus Group Report:

Navigating menopause together



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Introduction

As Director of Fatherhood Solutions, an organisation dedicated to creating pathways for men to seek support on their fatherhood journey and delivering training, mentoring and consultation as part of a systematic approach to father inclusive practice. I have always believed that men are willing to talk they just need the right environment and the permission to be vulnerable.

This focus group reaffirmed that belief. Despite the persistent myth that men are reluctant to share their feelings, what we discovered in this session is that they absolutely do, especially when it involves supporting their partners through something as complex and life changing as menopause.

We were approached by Action Menopause Warwickshire and Healthwatch Warwickshire to chair a focus group with men whose wives or partners had been affected by perimenopause or menopause. The goal was to gain valuable insights into what can help men support their partners and themselves during this transitional period.

This report highlights the challenges these men face, the information they feel they need about menopause, the support they are looking for, and ways in which workplaces can step up to play a more active role in offering that support.

Key Findings

- Men want workplace learning opportunities and talks on menopause to raise awareness and support.
- There is a need for policies that give men time to support their partners during medical appointments and provide better emotional support during this period.
- Men feel there is insufficient information in employee handbooks and HR systems regarding menopause.
- **Men would like support**, access to groups, information, more awareness, national advertising campaigns, more readily available information to avoid a google search being the only source of easily accessible information.
- Men would like to have a menopause pathway that would allow them to navigate this period together with appropriate support.

Recommendations

- **Introduce workplace learning initiatives**, such as awareness talks and training for employees and managers, on the impact of menopause.
- **Provide flexible working** options to attend relevant appointments.
- **Develop information packs and resources for staff:** Would like employers to help, raise awareness and offer guidance. (During the focus group one attendee said that his employer already does this and that was how he found out about this group, highlighting how this works)
- **Education across the board:** Normalise difficult conversations through education and awareness targeted at different stages throughout life.
- **Establish Peer Support Networks:** Launch peer-led support groups or forums where members can share their experiences, ask questions, and offer support in a judgment-free space. This will help to reduce isolation and enable members of the groups to handle the emotional demands of menopause.
- **Collaborate with Health Professionals:** Engage with healthcare providers to ensure men are included in consultations about menopause. By encouraging a family-centred approach to health, men will feel more involved in the process and better able to support their partners and create a supportive environment for women.

Overview of the Focus Group

We had 10 men from various backgrounds and age groups, all with partners going through perimenopause or menopause. Menopause is, of course, a significant life stage for women, but it is often overlooked that the men in their lives are impacted too.

A recent Healthwatch Warwickshire and Action Menopause Warwickshire survey for women found that the two main groups of men that women would like to know more about menopause are partners and employers in that order.

Men are frequently left feeling isolated, unsure, and ill-equipped to provide the support their partners need, simply because they aren't given the right information or resources.

In this focus group, we explored what men would like to know about menopause, the challenges they face, and the role that workplaces and national campaigns could play in better equipping them to provide support.

Men are eager to understand menopause better, but they often feel left in the dark.

As men navigate the complexities of supporting their partners through menopause, they have specific questions and needs for understanding this significant life stage.

What men would like to know

- **Symptoms and Experiences:** Men are looking for clear and accessible information about the symptoms associated with menopause. They want to understand the physical changes, such as hot flashes, night sweats, and changes in menstrual cycles, as well as the emotional impacts, including mood swings and irritability. Recognising that each woman's experience can differ greatly, men emphasised the importance of highlighting both the most common symptoms and the variations in how they manifest. This understanding is crucial for them to empathise with their partners' experiences.
- **Emotional and Psychological Impact:** The emotional toll of menopause is a significant concern for men. They want to know how this transition affects their partners' mental health, self-esteem, and overall emotional well-being. Understanding these changes is vital, as they often impact the dynamics of the relationship. Men are seeking guidance on how to approach difficult conversations and offer meaningful support, recognising that their partners may feel vulnerable or overwhelmed during this time. They would like to learn strategies for maintaining open lines of communication and create a supportive environment.
- **Stages and Duration:** Many men expressed surprise at the fact that menopause can begin earlier than they had previously thought. A significant percentage (60%) believed menopause started in the 50s, which led to confusion and frustration when their partners began experiencing symptoms earlier. This lack of awareness highlights the need for education around the timeline and progression of menopause, helping men recognise the signs and support their partners more effectively.
- **Hormonal Changes and Medical Treatments:** Questions surrounding hormonal treatments, particularly hormone replacement therapy (HRT), are prevalent among men. Many expressed concerns after hearing about potential links between HRT and breast cancer, leaving them uncertain about how to support their partners' treatment decisions. They seek reliable information on the risks and benefits of HRT, as well as

alternative treatments, to better understand how to engage in conversations about health and wellness during this transition.

- **Communication Strategies:** Men are eager to learn effective communication strategies for discussing menopause openly and sensitively. They want to know how to initiate these conversations without causing frustration or discomfort for their partners. The group expressed worry about saying the wrong thing, which could lead to further upset. By acquiring practical tools for communication, men hope to create a more supportive and understanding atmosphere that encourages dialogue and connection.

How men would like to receive information

The group shared specific preferences for how they would like to receive information and support:

- **Workshops and Seminars:** Men valued the opportunity to learn in interactive settings, where both partners could participate.
- **Online Resources:** Short videos, articles, and podcasts were favoured as easy-to-digest formats that break down complex topics into manageable pieces.
- **Printed Guides and Infographics:** Men expressed interest in simple, practical guides they could refer to quickly, potentially distributed through national campaigns.
- **Consultations with Professionals:** Having access to medical professionals to discuss their partner's symptoms and potential treatments was viewed as highly beneficial.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Men found the idea of joining peer groups to discuss their experiences helpful. A small percentage (20%) also expressed interest in couples-focused support groups.

The impact of menopause

Men in the group shared their experiences of the impact this period in their life takes on them while trying to support their partners. Here are some key points they raised:

- **Feeling Helpless:** A recurring sentiment among the men was a sense of helplessness. Many expressed that they often feel unprepared and lack the necessary tools or knowledge to genuinely assist their partners during this challenging time. This feeling of inadequacy leaves them frustrated; they want to be supportive but often don't know how. Importantly, they don't see themselves as needing to "fix" their partners' issues; instead, they are seeking ways to be a source of comfort and encouragement. This desire for connection highlights their commitment to their partners' well-being.
- **Strain on Intimacy:** The group acknowledged the impact of menopause on physical and emotional intimacy. For many men, love languages often revolve around physical touch and words of affirmation. As menopause can affect a woman's libido and emotional state, these expressions of love can become less frequent, leading to feelings of distance and disconnect. Men expressed a longing for intimacy that they fear may be waning, which adds another layer of emotional strain to both partners.
- **Misunderstanding and Frustration:** The emotional rollercoaster of menopause can create fertile ground for misunderstandings. Approximately **70%** of the group admitted to unintentionally causing more upset due to their lack of understanding. They often struggled with how to articulate their concerns or approach sensitive topics without seeming dismissive or critical. This struggle can lead to frustration on both sides, as men grapple with wanting to help while also fearing they might exacerbate the situation.
- **Reassurance and Health Concerns:** Around **50%** of the men voiced concerns that symptoms like brain fog and mood swings could indicate something more sinister than menopause. This anxiety can create additional pressure as they navigate their partners' experiences,

prompting a need for reassurance and clarity about what is “normal” during this transition.

- **Mental Health:** Many reported feeling uncertain about how to manage their emotions, especially when they felt they weren't providing meaningful support. Some articulated a struggle between offering sympathy and truly empathising with their partners' experiences, which can create a sense of disconnection. They desire a deeper understanding of what their partners are going through to bridge this gap and cultivate a stronger emotional connection.

Workplace support

The group highlighted several areas where proactive workplace support would be helpful. Here is what they proposed:

- **Workplace Learning:** There is a strong desire among men for workplace learning focused on menopause and as well as other life events such as mental health, cancer, neurodiversity as part of a wellbeing strategy. They believe that having access to this knowledge early on, before personal situations arise, would educate them to better support their partners and families. These learning opportunities should cover the symptoms, emotional impacts, and practical ways to provide support, creating an environment of understanding and compassion within the workplace.
- **Flexible Working Policies:** Some of the group **20%** expressed frustration over rigid workplace policies that hinder their ability to attend medical appointments with their partners implying they are navigating this alone. The lack of flexibility often leads to feelings of guilt and helplessness, as they genuinely want to be there for their loved ones but feel constrained by inflexible work hours. **30%** of the group expressed their desire for employers to implement flexible working options that enable men to take the necessary time off without suffering financial repercussions. However, the group did recognise that without legislation and policies this could be very difficult particularly for small businesses.

This change would not only benefit men but also promote a culture of support for women navigating menopause.

- **Information Packs:** The group suggested that companies create comprehensive information packs or online resources accessible via the company intranet. These resources would serve as valuable tools for men seeking to understand menopause better and learn effective ways to support their partners. By providing this information, employers can develop a more informed workforce that can engage empathetically with their colleagues and loved ones.
- **Manager and HR Support:** Several participants reported feeling unsupported by their line managers, highlighting a gap in workplace policies that cater to the unique needs of employees dealing with menopause. They called for targeted training for managers on menopause, equipping them with the knowledge to support their teams effectively.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing Support:** The group discussed and felt that existing workplace wellbeing programs often overlook the significant emotional and mental health impacts of supporting a partner through menopause. They suggested that mental health support is made available during this time so that they can effectively understand their partner's journey.

What women said about the menopause

These are direct quotes from a recent survey by Action Menopause Warwickshire and Healthwatch Warwickshire.

“It’s a really obvious reminder that you are getting old and less able to do things. The fact that you can no longer have children, whether or not you want to. I think this is true however easy or hard the menopause is.”

“That it is real and not just complaining! Some of us became so altered that we lose the person we were, which is absolutely devastating.”

“The symptoms are variable over time - hormonal changes follow a very jagged course over time, not a smooth and constant decline.”

“We need to develop the friendship and companionship more with a partner, rather than focusing on sexual intimacy as a main driver in the relationship.”

“My partner looked up menopause (without my knowledge) and it told him what being healthy looked like and how I'd need some support. He also looked up symptoms and told me that my burning mouth was menopause which I'd been worried about. It was so helpful him doing some of the heavy lifting. I appreciate it so much and don't feel so alone.”

“Patience and understanding are the key requirements.”

What men said - some direct quotes from the focus group:

“We know that men kill themselves more than anything else, lots of what we're discussing here is why, because they don't have these outlets, we don't have spaces to talk. We're impacted by all of this. And then like you've mentioned the breakdown of relationships caused by so much of this then leaves them alone.”

“It doesn't need to be too definitive. Does not have to be 73% of the time, just something saying these are the sort of things you get, like you see on medication. This is what you get a lot of the time, a bit of the time, these are things where you need to worry about.”

“The forgetfulness' is a worry at times, You do not want to just laugh things off, but you need to take a more productive approach if something like that happens. And I think that's it's just having an idea of it or how to address it.”

“For me it turned out that because of the depression I had that testosterone levels as well just fell off and I thought, that's really similar to what women go through because with your testosterone levels, you have a separate brain fog, amongst other things linked to depression. I think people don't realized there is a change in temperature and aches and pains as well as mood, So a lot of us, a lot of men understand more than we think about what they are going through with menopause.”

“So first I would change the perspective I don't see myself as being the person trying to support the person. I see my partner and I being a partnership. So, we're supporting each other. you know, so there are impacts on them which are obvious, you know, physical, you know, very, very physical, all the various other things. but there are impacts on me. So, it's not me trying to solve their problem. It's us trying to collectively work through this this change. So that's a fundamental difference. so, um yeah, that's probably my biggest point.”

“I see it as we're a partnership, how can we collectively get through this together?”

“Do you think the women see it the same way? I don't know the first thing that came to my mind there was about timing because actually I look at this in

hindsight. I mean if you said to me, sir, when did they first go through the menopause, I wouldn't know the exact point it's was accumulative."

Recommendations

Based on the insights gathered, here's what the men in the focus group would like to implement to better support men—and by extension, their partners—during perimenopause & menopause:

- **National Campaign on Menopause:** There's a strong case for a national awareness campaign about menopause that reaches both men and women. The campaign should include accessible resources, workshops, and open dialogue to ensure men feel informed and prepared to offer support.
- **Workplace Support Initiatives:** Implement training in the workplace to support women and men.
- **Mental Health and Peer Support Groups:** Providing access to mental health resources and peer support groups would help men feel less isolated and better equipped to handle the emotional strain.
- **Education for Families and Children:** Education for all ages would help families stay connected, rather than distanced, during this challenging time.
- **Education in school during sexual health conversations:** Education around perimenopause and menopause including signs & symptoms and what to expect.

Conclusion

The focus group revealed a strong willingness among men to engage in conversations about menopause, highlighting their readiness to support their partners. However, for men to participate effectively, they need the appropriate platforms, resources, and support. This discussion has made it clear that men are eager to be involved in the dialogue surrounding menopause—they simply require the right information and tools to do so confidently.

Implementing simple changes in the workplace, along with launching national campaigns focused on menopause awareness, can create an environment where both men and women can navigate this significant life transition together. Providing access to educational resources, support networks, and open forums for discussion will empower men to contribute meaningfully to their partners' experiences during menopause.

As one participant poignantly stated, “We know we can’t fix it, but we wish we could.” This statement encapsulates the essence of what men are feeling—they don’t seek to “fix” menopause; rather, they aspire to navigate it collaboratively with their partners.

To truly create a supportive atmosphere, it’s essential to equip men with the necessary tools, knowledge, and encouragement to engage in these conversations. By doing so, we can enhance the support system for both partners, ensuring that they face menopause together with understanding, empathy, and solidarity.

Thank You

I want to sincerely thank all the participants of this focus group. Your openness and honesty played a key role in shaping the findings of this report. By sharing your experiences, you've helped highlight the challenges men face in supporting their partners through menopause, which will guide improvements in education, workplace policies, and support.

I would also like to thank Action Menopause Warwickshire and Healthwatch Warwickshire for inviting me to chair this session.

Your dedication to including men in the conversation around menopause is greatly appreciated.



Action Menopause Warwickshire are a local charitable group founded by Advanced Nurse Practitioner Sue Thomas to support local women to access the services and products they require to live their lives well through the menopause.

Find out about regular meetings here: [Action Menopause Warwickshire](#)
email: info@actionmenopausewarwickshire.org.uk



Healthwatch Warwickshire are an independent service for everyone in Warwickshire who uses health and social care. We help people understand the health and social care system by providing information and signposting and gathering feedback on services. Together with our volunteers, we use the feedback heard to help improve NHS and Adult Social Care services.

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