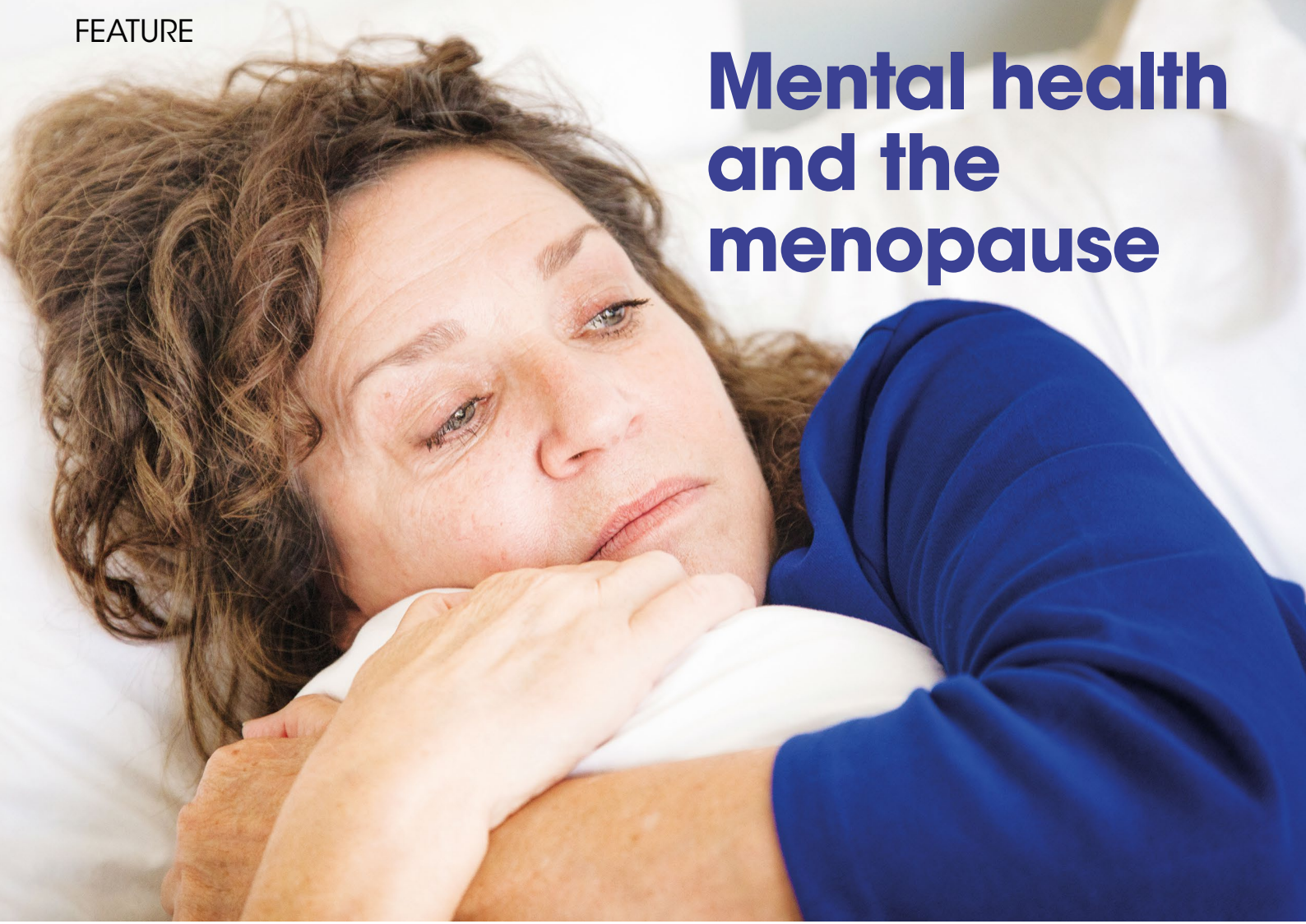


# Mental health and the menopause



**Fiona Ellwood**,<sup>1</sup> President of the Society of British Dental Nurses, looks at the menopause through the lens of stress, anxiety and mental health.

## Author information

<sup>1</sup>Fiona is the President and Executive Director of the Society of British Dental Nurses and a member of the Dental Professional Alliance (DPA). She has received a British Empire Medal (BEM) and acts as a key opinion leader and advisor for oral health and preventative practice, infection prevention and professional practice. She has a strong interest in population level health matters and inequalities in health. Fiona is heavily involved in education across the sector and invests a great deal of time on programme design and development with a strong focus on quality assurance and assessment.

**T**he Society of British Dental Nurses not only has a strong sense of the importance and need to confront the matter of the menopause but acknowledges that dental nursing as a professional group is predominantly female with approximately 58,538 dental nurses and only 825 of those male.<sup>1</sup>

Menopause has never really been openly or publicly discussed and to some extent has been deemed a taboo subject for many years. The menopause according to NICE<sup>2</sup> '...defines menopause as when a woman stops having periods as she reaches the end of her natural reproductive life'. What is evident through literature searches is the link and relationship between mental health and the menopausal transition. The menopause usually occurs between the ages of 45–55; menopause that occurs before age 40 is commonly known as

premature menopause.<sup>3</sup>

Sandilyan and Dening<sup>4</sup> assert that this is a time of significant change, making clear that the menopause is a physiological event rather than an illness. This may well have a profound impact on how the menopause is both perceived and managed on a day-to-day basis and particularly within the workplace. Of course, there is a need to consider the broader parameters of perimenopause and post menopause and not forgetting that there are those who experience the menopause naturally and those who experience the menopause because of surgical or medical intervention.

The menopausal transition more commonly occurs when other life events and social changes are happening, and this has caused some to question the true link between depressive thoughts and even mental health. The findings of many studies appear to be

inconclusive, but it appears to be an area of continued investigation.

What does resonate between the brief literature review undertaken by the Society and those who are contributing to our work is the impact of disturbed sleep, a lack of energy, poor memory (brain fog) and concentration. Other symptoms noted have been changes to skin, hair and weight. According to Mishra *et al.* (p 405),<sup>5</sup> the commonly reported systems are ‘...hot flushes and night sweats...’; for some hormone replacement therapy (HRT) may be an option; cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) may be a further suggestion and generally eating a healthy and balanced diet and exercising regularly is a suggestion.

The Society acknowledge that many women pass through the menopausal transition and following stages with ease but are acutely aware that many experience mild and sometimes major implications. The Society are currently interested in this subject matter in connection with two pieces of work, *Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion and Mental Health Wellness in the Workplace* and in particular, psychological safety.

*‘Many pass through the menopausal transition and following stages with ease but many experience mild and sometimes major implications.’*

We have a number of real-life stories from members who have shared their experiences of the menopause journey and the huge impact it has had on their lives. There are so many similarities: mood changes, feelings shifting from being low to being angry in nanoseconds, and a recognition of being a horrible person and then being riddled with guilt. Some have needed medical intervention and became desperate, whilst others have experienced depressive episodes and are now taking anti-depressants.

The Society have included a support network within their mental health working

team and signpost to various charitable organisations, campaigns, and resources. It matters to the Society that colleagues and members get the support they need, and that workplace talent is maintained;<sup>6</sup> the list below is not conclusive.

- British Menopause Society <https://thebms.org.uk/>
- Mental Health Foundation <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>
- 50Sense <https://www.50sense.net/>
- #knowYourMenopause <https://www.pausitivity.co.uk/>
- The Menopause Charity <https://www.themenopausecharity.org/>
- The Daisy Network <https://www.daisynetwork.org/>
- Menopause Matters <https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/>
- The Menopause Exchange <https://www.menopause-exchange.co.uk/>
- Fertility Friends <https://www.fertilityfriends.co.uk/>
- The Infertility Network UK; helpline 0800 008 7464, [admin@infertilitynetworkuk.com](mailto:admin@infertilitynetworkuk.com)

- Women’s Health Concern <https://www.womens-health-concern.org/>.

We also signpost members of the dental team to the British Menopause Society to access resources designed for the clinical team. The governance and policy team have also been involved in policy design and writing, so that workplace adjustments can be applied. We also encourage the utilisation of the Self-identification of Menopausal Symptoms forms to aid and design ways of supporting members of the dental team during the menopause.

We also serve to remind employers that those who fail to properly support women at work during the menopause could be found to be discriminatory. Equally the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 extends to the working conditions when experiencing menopausal symptoms.<sup>7</sup>

### Society of British Dental Nurses

The Society of British Dental Nurses aim to inspire and engage dental nurses at each and every stage of their career. For more information, visit <https://sbdn.org.uk/>.

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