

DENTAL PRACTICES WANT REASSURANCE ON HOW TO SUPPORT STAFF WITH MENOPAUSE

Just before World Menopause Day on 18 October, the Dental Defence Union's HR partner Peninsula said that dental practices want reassurance on how to support staff with menopause.

A recent legal judgement in which an employee was awarded £65,000 compensation after an employer failed to make reasonable adjustments when her role was affected by menopause symptoms, illustrates the importance for dental practices of having a menopause policy in place for staff.

Vicky Kitney from Peninsula said it was seeing an increase in enquiries from dental principals about accommodating staff with menopause symptoms.

Ms Kitney said: 'From 1 June 2023 to 31 August 2023, Peninsula received over 120 calls and emails from DDU members requesting advice on a range of HR matters.

'With the growing awareness of the need to support women with menopausal symptoms,

we are seeing a steady stream of enquiries from dental practices about this issue. These account for a small but significant number of cases and the trend is increasing.

'Typical scenarios include practices who want to accommodate staff experiencing symptoms like hot flushes, as well as enquiries about supporting those who may be struggling with performance issues like forgetfulness.

'The recent legal judgement is a reminder for all employers to ensure they make adjustments and support employees with menopause symptoms.

'Fostering an open, inclusive environment where employees feel they can raise concerns about how the menopause is affecting them with no stigma or embarrassment, will help practices in becoming menopause friendly employers.'

'Research has shown that 10% of women leave their jobs¹ and many more are reducing their hours or passing up promotions because

of their menopausal symptoms. Ensuring colleagues feel supported is an important part of addressing this concern. It should also help in meeting the overall commitments set out in NHS England's Long Term Workforce Plan,² which emphasises the need to retain valued employees by encouraging them to stay in the workplace.'

BDJ Team has published a collection of content on Menopause and the workplace. Visit <https://www.nature.com/collections/menopause>.

References

1. Fawcett. Menopause and the workplace. Available at: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/menopauseandtheworkplace> (accessed October 2023).
2. NHS England. NHS Long Term Workforce Plan. 30 June 2023. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan/> (accessed October 2023).

VAPING SHOULD NOT BE ADVISED AS A TRANSITION STRATEGY FOR TOBACCO CESSATION

For years, it has been known that smoking can contribute to serious damage on gum and oral health, with smokers having more gum diseases, more tooth loss, and increased levels of oral cancer. It has also been known that gum disease can play a negative role on systemic health, eg, it is implicated in diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, inflammatory bowel disease, and others.

In parallel, regular warnings against vaping usually only highlight its damage to the heart and lungs, but do not refer to oral health.

The European Federation of Periodontology (EFP) warns that vaping electronic cigarettes can be as harmful to gum and oral health as smoking traditional tobacco cigarettes. Despite the fact that the vaping phenomenon is relatively new compared to smoking, meaning research details are still incomplete, evidence does show a clear link between e-cigarettes and poor gum and oral health.

Unlike tobacco smokers, who are more aware of smoking as a risk factor for general health problems and for gum diseases, vaping users are often misled to think of e-cigs as somehow less harmful or even safe. Vaping may not be less detrimental to gum and oral health than smoking.

One of the reasons behind vaping's unhealthy impact is nicotine, whether smoked or vaped, which restricts the blood flow to the gums. Other chemicals contained in the e-cig vapour (including formaldehyde, propylene glycol, and benzene) may aggressively increase the damage to the mouth, starting with a progressive destruction of the periodontium.

Unfortunately, the number of vapers is growing globally at a fast rate. This uptake appears to be higher amongst teenagers, young adults, and people who have never smoked.

Andreas Stavropoulos, chair of the EFP's scientific affairs committee and EFP immediate past president said: 'Damage to the gums and the tissues supporting

the teeth, often to an irreversible state, is a likely adverse effect of vaping. This damage includes permanent resorption of the gums and the bone that keep the teeth in function and in the mouth. Treatment of these problems, depending on the extent, is often cumbersome, and expensive.

'For these reasons, at the EFP we urge oral healthcare professionals to not suggest vaping as a transition strategy of tobacco cessation, but rather to prioritise smoking cessation advice for both cigarettes and e-cigarettes alike, and to provide patients with information about the likely detrimental impact of vaping on gum and oral health.'

Vaping can harm oral health in a variety of additional ways, including bad breath, mouth and throat irritation, para-tracheal oedema, laryngitis, black tongue, nicotine stomatitis, hairy tongue, toothache, tooth discolouration, caries, tooth sensitivity and loss, increased cariogenic risk, reduced enamel hardness, and increased risk for cancer.