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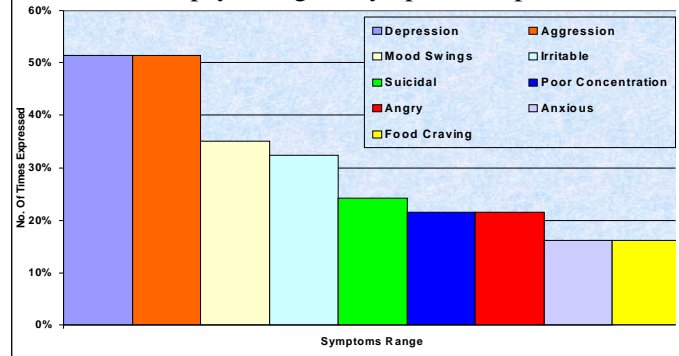
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## Menstrual Health in the Workplace

Most common psychological symptoms of pms



During the run up to menstruation serotonin levels 'drop like a stone' and the body says I must have some sugar, often chocolate. Chris said the best thing to do is to have a carbohydrate snack every 3 hours e.g.. pasta, rice crackers. Alcohol has a bigger effect on a premenstrual woman. A survey undertaken by NAPS revealed that 96% of the 1019 women questioned said that PMS had a negative effect on their personal relationships. 67% said PMS was a cause for taking time off work. Many women hide their symptoms.

The Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology reports that 'women want medical research to focus on reducing the huge day-to-day burden of reproductive health problems... Women feel below par for an average of 3-4 days per month'. So many women soldier on and take their problems for granted but there are now a lot of new treatments for menstrual ill health. Women should be able to obtain correct information and encouraged to seek help.

Trade unions are starting to be more aware to PMS and are offering advice. Smoking, being overweight and not being in a physically good shape make PMS worse.

NAPS website address is [www.pms.org.uk](http://www.pms.org.uk)



Chris Ryan from NAPS (National Association for Premenstrual Syndrome) spoke at a seminar organised by the Forum recently. Below is a brief outline of his presentation, a copy of his slides can be found on the Forum website. [www.baohsf.org.uk](http://www.baohsf.org.uk)

Chris introduced himself and said that people might think it is odd that a man is leading the NAPS and went on to say how he has been involved in developing recognition of the cyclical ill health in women and define PMS with founder member of NAPS - Dr Dalton, and challenging the low priority given to womens' health. NAPS is a patient led

independent organisation that advises, informs and supports whilst also undertaking clinical research and educational conferences. The helpline telephone number is 0870 777 21

By 2010 more women will be in the workforce than men. All women experience menstrual hormonal change, most women experience PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome). PMS is in a similar position that menopause was in ten years ago. Menstruation is a difficult subject and is a very sensitive issue in the workplace. Approximately 470 menstrual cycles will be experienced in a woman's lifetime.

14 days before a period women ovulate, at this time hormones get shaken up in the run up to the period, during the luteal phase, especially in the four or five days leading to menstruation. 30% of women experiencing severe symptoms and 8% experiencing chronic symptoms - Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. Symptoms are physical, behavioural and psychological. The most significant symptoms are depression, aggression, mood swings, suicidal feelings and poor concentration. Impacting on employment, relationships and parenting.



## Health, work and well-being – Caring for our future

A strategy for the health and well being of working age people by HM Government was published at the end of 2005 it was produced jointly by the Department of Work and Pensions, Dept of Health and the Health and Safety Executive. Below are some highlights from the strategy.

Patricia Hewitt David Blunkett – in a joint ministerial foreword said:

40 Million working days are still lost every year to occupational ill health and injury, and a third of those people coming onto Incapacity Benefit have come from work.

This strategy will help us work with all our partners across and outside Government to break the link between ill health and inactivity, to advance the prevention of ill health and injury, to encourage good management of occupational health, and to transform opportunities for people to recover from illness while at work, maintaining their independence and their sense of worth.....placing real responsibility not just in the hands of government, but with employers, individuals, the healthcare profession and all our stakeholders

The strategy is to be lead by a new national Director for Occupational Health and the creation of a National Charter for Health, Work and Well-being, The Gov is embarking on the second stage of a large-scale reform of the welfare state...to 'transform the welfare state from a crutch into a ladder'. There will be emphasis on opportunity to minimise the risk of employees becoming ill in the first place, improve employee retention by supporting them during periods of transition, and build a world which rehabilitate rather than rejects people when they experience illness or disability.

**The strategy clearly states that** work can help to improve your health, reduce health inequalities and offer improved opportunities. Due to changing demographics, the health and well-being of people of working age is of fundamental importance to our future. 'A job can itself be an important step in the road to recovery and rehabilitation'.

The Vision Includes: Healthcare services in the NHS and the independent sector that meet the needs of people of working age so they can remain in, or ease their return to work; Health is not adversely affected by work, and good quality advice and support is available to, and accessible by, all; and people with health conditions and disabilities are able to optimise work opportunities.

The strategy will help individuals by: Helping people manage minor health problems in work. A key aim of this strategy is to find ways of supporting employees in getting swift treatment so that they can remain in work; Helping people return to health following an absence from work because of illness. Adaptations to workplaces and work practices including time flexibilities can be another key to return to work; Helping people avoid work-related health problems.

### Maternity Rights

Ross Campbell from PERS (Pay and Employment Rights Service) spoke at the seminar about the rights of pregnant workers, these include the right:

- Not to be discriminated against in recruitment
- Not to be dismissed or selected for redundancy because of pregnancy/birth/maternity leave
- Written reasons for dismissal
- To be considered first for suitable alternative work
- Paid time off for ante natal appointments and classes, including travel time

If a worker informs her employer in writing that she is pregnant, the employer must do a risk assessment taking into account the pregnancy. If there are risks, she should be offered suitable alternative job on the same terms and conditions, or suspended on full pay.

All pregnant workers have the right to 26 weeks maternity leave. There are extra rights for pregnant workers who have 26 weeks of service. These include another 26 weeks maternity leave. Other extra rights for pregnant workers includes keeping contractual benefits eg holiday pay, pension contributions and increments.

Statutory Maternity Pay:

- 90% of pay for 6 weeks
- £106 for 20 weeks (or 90% of pay if less than £106)

**Small employers get 104.5% back, large ones 92% - from the Government**

Government plans to increase this and to add a further 13 weeks (transferable to partner)

Contracts can give more maternity pay Entitlement whether employee intends to return, or decides not to return

Some contracts say pay above minimum has to be repaid if employee doesn't return.

To find out more details about maternity rights and pay and parental, dependants and adoption leave contact:

[www.pers.org.uk](http://www.pers.org.uk)

**‘Our strategy will increase the number of people whose workplaces have access to occupational health support that is aimed at reducing the number of people who suffer from work-related ill health.’**

Action on healthy workplaces will include:

- Working with trade unions at local, regional and national levels
- Piloting links between GPs and employment support
- Working with relevant professional bodies
- Working with employers to make changes in the workplace necessary to allow people to work to a later age
- Introducing a smoke-free environment
- Engaging with all stakeholders, but especially employers, unions and insurers.

What will a successful strategy mean?

The Government, at both national and local levels, will work together with employers, trade unions, individuals, professional organisations, voluntary bodies and a range of other stakeholders to deliver this strategy with determination and long-term commitment.

By engaging with employers, employees and potential employers, local people and sectorial representatives from the outset, we will be able to address any needs and plan together how delivery will be achieved.

## Welfare review

Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum is hopeful that the new welfare reform will provide extra occupational health assistance to people who have skills to offer but currently can not find suitable employment. It is also aware of the strong Trade Union views that the welfare review is not helping to stop people being made ill by work and is punishing those already made ill back into employment. It is obviously not always a straightforward distinction between those that are fit to work and those that are not. Many people on incapacity benefit would welcome the chance to work if reasonable adjustments could be made to allow them to do this. Many people cannot fit into the full thrust of the working 24/7 work ethic. Many people on incapacity benefit would like to do some work as it helps them financially and also gives them a sense of pride and a feeling of belonging to society.

Various documents surfacing recently have outlined the benefits to health that work can bring. One of the main concerns of the Forum, though, is that there is not enough flexibility in assisting people who have encountered barriers to work to get back into work. The proposed changes to make it easier to try out work without suffering benefit loss are welcomed. It appears to some that there are many people

enjoying the life of Riley on long term incapacity benefit, I think this is not the case as the benefit starts at £55.90 a week! Something that is often overlooked is that you can only claim this benefit if you have worked and paid national insurance contributions.

Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum is looking forward to being involved as a stakeholder in the reform of the work and well-being agenda. But it is cautious about the consequences of the proposed Employment and Support Allowance if it goes down the road of a purely financial driven regulatory ‘workfare-style compulsion’ in inappropriate situations. Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum is aware of the limited occupational health services currently provided for workers, and the fact that many thousands of people in work are being made ill by their work.

## Warning about relaxing asbestos regulations



Ann Cryer MP is one of the 103 MPs who have signed an Early Day Motion to ask the Government to review proposed changes that would relax the rules on removing asbestos. The proposed changes to the control of asbestos at work regulations are causing an outcry from occupational health and safety representatives throughout the country.

Jane Howie from, Keighley based, Bradford Area Occupational Health and Safety Forum said “The relaxed regulations would put workers and even children of workers at risk from life-threatening cancers, as exposure has been found on dust from a close relatives clothes. A recent inquest into the death of Barry Welch, 32, who is thought to be the youngest Briton to die from asbestos-related lung disease, found he was exposed to dust on his stepfather’s workclothes when he was a toddler.”

“It only takes one fibre from asbestos to cause mesothelioma. Not everyone who is exposed to asbestos contracts cancer, some people are more susceptible than others. The main reason for the relaxing of regulations seems to be cost cutting, not protecting workers and families.”

The EDM expresses concern at the dropping of textured coatings, such as Artex (which contains up to 10 percent of asbestos material!) from the list that only licensed contractors are approved to remove. It also says there is further concern that the Health and Safety Executive has arrived at this proposal without a proper evaluation of the risk associated with the material.

Contact: Carol Duerden from the Bradford Asbestos Support Group for further details on 0127 393949

### Bits and pieces

Workers Memorial Day 28th April- Hazards is asking for all workplacws to take 1 minutes silence at noon to remember hose that have died at work. See [www.hazards.org/wmd](http://www.hazards.org/wmd) for nore details.

Healthy Work Matters slips and trips 'road show' is to take place on Monday 20th March 2006 at the Health and Safety Laboratory at Buxton. Contact Jade Summer on 01298 18803 for details.

If you would like to receive the monthly bulletin from the National Association fro Premenstrual Syndrome please log into their website [www.pms.org.uk](http://www.pms.org.uk) and fill in your email details.

The Faculty of Public Health and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine have been working together to produce a guide for health professionals and employers. It covers why it makes sense to tackle work-related ill-health and promote well-being in your workforce with suggestions of what can be done. A leaflet covering the key points can be found at [www.fph.org.uk](http://www.fph.org.uk)



See [www.hse.gov.uk/betterbusiness/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/betterbusiness/index.htm)

Have a look at this HSE site which helps businesses -

Work accidents and ill health can be expensive. Stopping them happening can save you time and money. The smaller your business the bigger the impact will be if a member of your staff has a serious accident, or is off sick for an extended period of time. It could even put you out of business.

There are several important areas to consider if you want to reduce the cost of ill health or accidents caused by the working environment.

- ◆ Absence
- ◆ Replacement staff/
- ◆ Recruitment costs
- ◆ Insurance and compensation
- ◆ Reputation damage
- ◆ Productivity and efficiency

The Securing Health Together in the Bradford District 2006-2010 –A revised local occupational health and safety strategy is to be launched by BAOHSF in March 2006.

## BAOHSF

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To receive newsletters, seminar lists and keep in touch please complete this forum membership slip

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