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To make real progress menopause cannot remain a taboo

By [Christina McKelvie](#) Minister for Older People and Equalities

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OVER half the population will go through the menopause; so why do many still regard it as a taboo subject?

I've heard it described as “just a few hot flushes” but for many women, it's so much more than that.

I believe we need to talk more about the different ways in which menopause affects different people.

Yesterday I spoke at a conference in Glasgow dedicated to hearing about the varying experiences women of different ages and backgrounds have had in relation to the menopause, and the impact that it had on their lives – particularly in the workplace.

The average age for the menopause is 45 to 55 but for some women it can start in their 30s, or even younger.

Every person's experience is different but there are common symptoms. On average, women continue to experience symptoms for four years but around 10% of women have symptoms for up to 12 years – sometimes longer.

The number of older women in employment has been rising for a number of years due to several demographic and societal changes.

More women want to work later in life and importantly our economy needs them so I welcome this change. But it means that many more will now experience the menopause whilst part of the workforce.

So it's alarming to see that a 2017 STUC women's committee's survey on menopause in the workplace revealed 99% of respondents either didn't have or didn't know if they had a workplace menopause policy and 63% said the menopause has been treated as a joke at work.

In a recent survey from the British Menopause Society, almost half of women said the menopause had a strong impact on their life and felt their symptoms had a negative impact on their work. Some 47% said if they needed to take a day off because of the menopause, they wouldn't feel comfortable disclosing the real reason to their employer or colleagues. This is simply unacceptable in today's workforce.

As the Minister for Older People and Equalities my portfolio gives me the ideal opportunity to work across Government on this issue.

With my colleagues in health and fair work, I can support the Government to ensure our policies mitigate the impact the menopause has on many women's lives.

So the time has come to start talking more about the menopause in the workplace.

We happily talk about maternity and parental issues so why not this? As the first country in the world to provide access to free sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities, the Scottish Government is showing its commitment to women's health.

I want to lead by example and encourage more employers to offer support to women if needed. Which is why the Scottish Government's Gender Pay Gap Action Plan and Older People's Framework – both due to be published this spring – will include actions on the menopause.

It affects every woman at some point, therefore it is vital we feel comfortable speaking about it and end the stigma.