

Appendix 2 Questionnaire from photo exhibition

These written comments on the menopause experience can be used instead of photos in Session 1 to trigger discussion of their menopause experiences with visually impaired people.

Results of Questionnaire

Q1. What concerns or worries did you have before reaching the menopause?

“Was concerned about memory loss and getting confused.”

“None”

“Maybe some loss of femininity.”

“Realising that I would no longer be able to have children.”

“Risk of heart problems. Made “real” by lifelong weight problem.”

“Not many really! I never gave it much thought, believing the Menopause was part of life to be dealt with when it arrived.”

“Being peri-menopausal couldn’t be worse than my very severe pre-menstrual syndrome, for which I had to be treated.”

“I never had any real concerns - I looked forward to it as a release from my heavy bleeding.”

“Because of “emergency” hysterectomy at 39 - no thoughts or worries at all.”

“Wondering if I could cope with it when it finally came.”

“Worried about Osteoporosis.”

“Can I cope with the way I feel - can others cope with me?”

“Feeling very emotional.”

“Emotional swings - irritability. Family worries.”

Q2. What were the main problems for you in the menopause years?

“Sweating, because I get hot a lot, and it always happens at the wrong time and in the wrong place!”

“Night sweats, hot flushes, feeling tired and very irritable. Bloating, especially at night, dry skin and itching. Putting on a lot of weight.”

“Lack of energy.”

“Heavy loss of blood, which I later found out I could have had help with.”

“Lack of ‘zip’. Forgetfulness. Lack of concentration. Tiredness.

“Messy heavy irregular periods.”

“Mood swings were a real problem, and absolute fatigue, exacerbated by overworking and a failing relationship.”

“As a quadriplegic, my temperature control doesn’t function, so a hot flush would push my temperature up to 102. Forever cold water and fan. Also worried about osteoporosis and thinning tissue.”

“Slowing or deterioration of the brain. Weight gain. Trying to lose weight unsuccessfully and finally accepting it. (Coming to terms with this is the hardest part)/ Hot night time flushes.”

“Relationship problems - causing increased emotional fragility at time.

“Balancing home and work commitments. Making time for me.”

“Not sleeping.”

“Anxiety and panic attacks.”

“Feeling as if I’d lost the plot”.

“Total isolation from the rest of the world around me - feeling an alien in my own home.”

Q3. Who or what helped you get through it more easily?

“My pets. I had a cat at first, whom I would stroke, when I got all hot and fidgety. Now I have a dog, who is the best of all, we go for walks.”

“Mostly my husband’s patience and understanding. Eventually, HRT having found one which suited me after 5 years, due most to a change of doctor.”

“Understanding and support from family, friends and work colleagues.”

“Knowledge that friends are in the same boat.”

“Moral support from older women. Emotional, physical and spiritual support from women friends. Changing my diet to mainly vegetarian.

“Learning to care for myself better and realise my needs are important too.”

“Kalms herbal medication.”

“Black sense of humour. Stubbornness - determination not be beat.”

“Menopause HRT Clinic. Discussion groups, talking about the problems of the menopause.”

“HRT and counselling.”

“Yoga and exercise.”

“Talking on the telephone endlessly to my sister and friends.

“A great conviction in the power of positive thinking

Q4. What were the good things for you in the Menopause years?

“Not having periods or PMS”

“Using the time to consider what changes I wanted and could make in my life.”

“Feeling free.”

“Still trying to find out - there will be some.”

“Re-finding my own strength of character. Making more friends.

“Developing woman to woman relationship with my grown up daughters and being blessed with grandchildren. Having more time for me and making sure I took it!”

“Not having the inconvenience of bleeding, as a disabled wheelchair user.”

“A clear mind and motivation to do more interesting things. eg. Art, Travel etc.”

“Not feeling guilty about relaxing and working at a slower pace.”

“Freedom.”

“H.RT.”

“Increasing self confidence. Children growing up, seeing family develop,.

“Proud and sense of achievement.”

“Becoming part of a team, who were pioneering the learning about menopause.”

Q5. What did you change in your life to help you cope better?

“Gave or am giving myself more time. I am being kinder to me.”

“Tried to relax more, went for long walks, and spent more time with my husband and family.”

“Realisation that it was O.K. to say ‘No’ sometimes.”

“Scaled down my commitments. Enjoyed being in the garden. Helping my husband.”

“Left home! Divorced! (very drastic measures). Went to self help classes”

“Word-processing, assertiveness training, self defence, counselling skills, Yoga, Aromatherapy and massage. Anything I could find that would empower me.”

“Nothing consciously.”

“Changed my doctor! The arrival of grandchildren. Regular daily rest.

“Loss of weight.”

“My sleep pattern.”

“Back to fitness - circuit training and swimming. Healthier eating.

“Made time for me. Ending negative relationships. Plan social activities.”

“Going out more. Joined night classes.”

“Re-diet and healthier lifestyle.”

“Retiring early from work, which as becoming increasingly stressful by the day.”

“My expectations!!!”

“Began to write everything down. Made lists of tasks to be completed.”

“For me it is my church life and taking active part by getting involved in things I enjoy.”

“I did more exercise - only gentle exercise, but it did help.”

“Changing or attempting to change the Status Quo - at times undergoing great risk to my domestic surroundings. Going to the brink (and back).

“Kept growing flowers. Had long soaks in the bath, when I could think and reflect.”

Q6. What was the best advice you heard about the menopause?

“Myra Hunter’s Positive view of the menopause - not the end, but the beginning of a new phase.” See booklist at end of toolkit.

“A friend told me when I get hot and sweating to drink cold water.”

“Don’t fight it!”

“Not everybody has a bad time. Some people just sail through it.”

“Accept it.”

“See as the beginning of the rest of your life.

“Stop smoking. Stop drinking alcohol.”

“Loved and laughed at Germaine Greer’s book “*The Change*”.

“*HRT keeps women out of the mad house and the divorce Courts*” Lee Rodwell The Times 24 September 1987 from “*Is it therapy or is it a treat*”.

“I didn’t know much about the menopause and regret not seeking advice because the onset for me was a tremendous shock to the system.”

“I didn’t hear any advice really - my friends were not yet at that stage!”

“Great believer is positivity - even when having “problem times.” Make time for you. Life begins. Look forward.”

“That there is life during and after the menopause.”

“That I could prepare for it, by becoming informed and taking steps to make it good for me. It isn’t a life sentence.”

“Did not read any. The doctor explained about HRT.”

“This is a natural phase and that there is life after 40.”

“To quote the bible “*It cameto pass*”.

Q7. What would you tell someone to help prepare them for the menopause years – and life after menopause?

“Get a hobby, cooking - but best of all, gardening. Keep doing things that makes you happy.”

“There is help available. HRT, herbal remedies etc. Learn to relax, spend time on yourself, pampering. There IS life after the menopause, make the most of it.”

“Positive thinking - Sense of humour.”

“Don’t fight it and don’t be afraid to access and accept any help offered.”

“Don’t worry - help is available - seek out menopause clinics - you may not need to go through your GP to get an appointment.

“After the menopause, live life to the full - you deserve it.”

“Ask for/look for helpful treatments/remedies.”

“Remember, you are special too. You have the right to be treated with respect/listened to/ cared for. Be with people who make you feel good.”

“Read, read, get all the alternative therapy stuff and think of it as a release.”

“I do not see the menopause as the beginning of the end of myself as a woman – but as a time of being released into a further period of fruitful life.”

“To find out as much information as possible by talking to your doctor or reading, so that you are fully aware of the changes taking place.”

“Try and accept it as a normal stage on the ‘journey of life’ - it happens to all females. Look forward to the next step.”

“Try to stay active. Homeopathic treatment.”

“Enjoy. If problems, then share with friend – health professional. Think positive - make time for you.”

“Look at past achievements and plan for future goals. Health eating. Importance of exercise. Main advice - if unhappy with anything, then try to change it.”

“Don’t put up with problems, go and see somebody and get it sorted out.”

“Read as much as you can and talk to friends.”

“It is different for everyone. Be able to laugh at yourself and grow older gracefully.”

“It’s not as bad as you think.”

“Don’t take on too much - know your limits, but never limit your knowledge.

“Learn to say ‘No’ to extra demands and not feel guilty.”

“Just hold on - spring will come. Take time to re-evaluate your life.”

Q8. Have you had any funny experiences - or heard or read any “menopause years” experiences or jokes that could lighten someone’s day?

“What do you do when your Kotex catches fire? Throw it on the floor and tampon it!”

“Women don’t have hot flushes - they have power surges.”

“I get a bit fed up with so called funny people on radio or TV saying “She’s menopausal” and suggesting women turn into strange objects.”

“If your life is a £1 coin and you are 50 now. How will you spend/waste your other 50 pence?”

”Broaden your horizons - not your beam!”

“It’s your age and you’ll just have to put up with it - like we did in the olden days.”

“Enjoy your new sexual freedom, without the worry of “being up the spout!”

“A friend gave me a quotation about it being something new, not to be frightened of it - as it was like a door and I could go through it with confidence.”Menopause