

NPH Menopause Clinical & Research Unit

Menopause Management & COVID19

In line with government and public health advice, there is currently reduced direct patient contact in most healthcare sectors. This is to help reduce the risk of infection for the wider population and healthcare staff. This document provides an update on recent issues around the menopause and its treatment during this time.

1. Product Supply

There continues to be availability issues with hormone replacement therapy (HRT) products which relates to manufacturing shortages. The national bodies have been working closely with pharmaceutical companies to try and rectify this.

What can the GP or practice pharmacist do?

1. Issue the prescription as normal, but advise the patient that their medication is currently in short supply, so if they are unable to find a pharmacy to provide their medication, they may need to take a different brand of HRT for now.
2. If they are unable to find some supplies, the patient should contact the surgery for a telephone consultation with GP or practice pharmacist, who will issue an alternative prescription for them.

Although a change might not be what a patient wants, there are alternative treatment options available that can support them through these difficult times. The British Menopause Society provides regular updates on HRT supply issues

<https://thebms.org.uk/> and has a useful guide on switching HRTs

<https://thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/HRT-alternatives-04.11.2019.pdf>

2. Remote prescribing

Primary Care health professionals can use the resources from PCWHF, endorsed by BMS, written to help with undertaking a virtual HRT consultation due to current COVID restrictions. <https://pcwhf.co.uk/resources/how-to-manage-hrt-provision-without-face-to-face-consultations-during-covid-19-healthcare-restrictions-old/> and for management of HRT bleeding [https://thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BSGE-document-HMB31.3.20final .pdf](https://thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BSGE-document-HMB31.3.20final.pdf)

3. The menopause and mood

The menopause is not necessarily a stressful time, but occurs during midlife when women may be dealing with other challenges and the COVID19 crisis may be adding to this. Symptoms such as hot flushes and night sweats can affect sleep, which in

turn can impact on general well-being. Please see this link for digital NHS resources that are recommended strategies to assist with symptoms of mood, anxiety and sleep <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/>. Local voluntary organisations have also set up counselling support helplines and this information will be available on the local council website.

4. The menopause and bone health

HRT can be used for control of menopausal symptoms and to help protect bone density. Exercise also plays an important part in reducing risk as well. Lockdown provides an opportunity to integrate some exercise into a woman's daily routine. These should include weight bearing and muscle strengthening exercise and relaxation therapies which will also help. Any exercise a woman is able to do is a positive step. Please see the two links below for advice on exercising:

<https://theros.org.uk/information-and-support/living-with-osteoporosis/exercise-and-physical-activity-for-osteoporosis>

<http://www.menopause.org/for-women/menopauseflashes/bone-health-and-heart-health/bone-health-exercise-is-a-key-component>

HRT and breast cancer

There was a medical paper published in August 2019 that discussed the association between HRT and breast cancer and made prominent headlines in the news. The following article from the British Menopause Society provides an interesting assessment. <https://thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HRT-and-breast-cancer-risk-should-women-be-worried.pdf>

The Northwick Park Hospital Menopause Clinic

Through NHS e-referrals, you can request advice and guidance which is often the quickest way to help a patient.

We continue to provide a weekly menopause clinic for new and follow up patients, providing a telephone consultation for your patients. Unfortunately there is no opportunity for face-to-face consultations currently. All the information we have access to comes in either the GP referral letter or, for follow-ups, the last clinic letter, and of course the information the patient provides for us during the consultation. We will complete outpatient new medication recommendations and post to the GP rather than give them to the patient. We will provide the usual letter to the GP, copied to the patient, but these letters may be delayed due to limited manpower and administrative services. If we feel there is an urgent need for a face-to-face consultation, we will contact the GP.

We are aware of the limitations of this service, and we feel that some women may not receive as much perceived support and empathy for their condition, and there are challenges for women who would usually have some help with language issues, and difficulties discussing intimate and personal details over the phone. We encourage you to manage your patients with confidence and use the resources above. We aim to discharge patients back to your care with a management plan.

For further advice health professionals can contact the Northwick Park Menopause Unit's Link-line on 0208 869 2937 or email nuttantanna@nhs.net / kabernethy@nhs.net.

Patients can call on 0208 869 2877 or email kabernethy@nhs.net.

The Northwick Park Menopause & Clinical Research Unit is a training unit, and can provide resources, including history taking proformas, symptom assessment charts and guidelines.