Working through menopause with e-help

#worldmenopauseday 18th October 2020

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Researching digital health interventions for menopausal women in the nursing workplace

Menopause, like menstruation, is a little-discussed topic, even though it affects half the population.

Symptoms generally appear from age 45 onwards and can last more than ten years. To varying degrees, women going through menopause may experience hot flushes, night sweats, vaginal dryness and discomfort during sex, difficulty sleeping, low mood and/or anxiety, reduced sex drive, problems with memory or concentration, headaches, palpitations, joint stiffness, aches and pains, reduced muscle mass, recurrent urinary tract infections and increased risk of developing osteoporosis.

These uncomfortable, or in some cases, debilitating, aspects of the menopausal life-phase are a concern for workforce populations dominated by women, particularly if these women decide to self-manage their discomfort or distress by reducing their work hours or retiring early.

Our international research study focuses on one female-dominated workforce – nursing. In four different countries on both sides of the world, we are investigating registered nurses' experiences of menopause and how it impacts their professional lives. We also want to know what kinds of support they want and whether digital health therapies or strategies would be useful.

The study is being conducted in the United Kingdom, Finland, New Zealand and Australia, using focus groups to explore the experiences of working nurses and to gather their ideas about what kinds of digital health resources would best suit their needs.

The Researchers

United Kingdom – University of Essex

Dr Camille Cronin is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Research and Impact at the School of Health and Social Care, University of Essex. She is the Co-Chief Investigator leading on the Digital Health Intervention and Menopause Project.
Her research interests include lifelong learning, workplace learning and workforce issues including retention and skill mix, dementia and culture in the healthcare workforce, mouthcare in acute hospitals, socialisation of student nurses in dementia care, pedagogy and curriculum, women's health and digital health and qualitative methodologies particular case study research, ethnography and narrative research.

Gemma Bidwell is a Practice Educator at the School of Health and Social Care, University of Essex. She is the research assistant working on the Digital Health Intervention and Menopause Project. Her research interests include women and child health.

Australia – University of Newcastle

Prof Rhonda Wilson is Professor of Nursing at the University of Newcastle, Australia and also at Massey University, New Zealand. She is an experienced mental health and digital health researcher, a credentialed Mental Health Nurse and a Registered Nurse. She has published extensively in international journals, book chapters and conference papers and is a member of the Editorial Board for the International Journal of Mental Health Nursing. Rhonda is Co-Chief Investigator for the Digital Health Intervention and Menopause Project
https://www.newcastle.edu.au/profile/rhonda-wilson

Dr Janene Carey is a research associate with skills in interviewing, writing and editing. Her PhD used narrative inquiry to explore how family carers cope with the challenge of caring for a dying loved one at home. She has been employed as a research assistant on a diverse range of projects, including LGBTI ageing, nurse practitioners in aged care, bilingualism in the bush and out-of-field teaching and the Digital Health Intervention and Menopause Project
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New Zealand – Massey University

Dr Kerri-ann Hughes is a Lecturer in the School of Nursing at Massey University, New Zealand. Her PhD used case study to explore the positional relationship of senior nursing leadership and the Chief executive Officers across the New Zealand public health setting. Kerri-ann teaches across undergraduate and postgraduate nursing programs in leadership and has also taught across both Nursing and Management Schools at Massey. She is interested in nursing and health leadership, ethical leadership and women's health and is a current member of the Massey University Ethics Health Committee. She is an Investigator on the Digital Health Intervention and Menopause Project k.a.hughes@massey.ac.nz

Finland – Tampere University

Prof Marja Kaunonen is Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Health Sciences at Tampere University in Finland. Marja is the current president of the ENTER Network: European Network on Training, Education and Research in Mental Health https://www.entermentalhealth.net/. Marja's research portfolio includes research with families in challenging life situations, such as mental illness, cancer or death of a family member as well as birth of a new baby, and support in challenging life situations. She has around 200 peer reviewed scientific publications.

Dr Tuija Leppäkoski is a Doctoral researcher in the Health Sciences Unit, Tampere University and an Investigator on the Digital Health Intervention and Menopause Project. She has conducted research on intimate partner violence and domestic violence, including child maltreatment across several research projects from 2008.
Tuija also has a Master -CSLE® (Certified Master Supervisor and Coach of Leaders and Executives). She has provided counselling to a wide range of people in social and health care professions in regard to occupational-related issues.

How did the project start?

Camille Cronin and Rhonda Wilson first met in 2015 at the Royal College of Nursing international research conference in Nottingham, United Kingdom. They found they had similar interests in qualitative research in health and social care and decided to collaborate on a project.

The first project meeting was a few years later, in Denmark. In 2017, Rhonda took up a position as Associate Professor of E-Mental Health at the University of Southern Denmark. In January 2018, she and Camille met up to explore their common interests and choose a contemporary problem as their focus. They settled on menopause and the use of digital health interventions to provide support and information for working women distressed by its symptoms. They developed a search strategy and began a literature review. Interestingly, they discovered there were fewer than five articles in peer-reviewed journals on the topic from 2010-2020. Searching the grey literature, they found women seeking advice on handling

menopause were relying on social media and informal groups, where the information was of dubious quality.

After the 2019 International RCN Nursing Research Conference at Sheffield, United Kingdom, they decided to focus their initial research on the female-dominated nursing workforce and began writing a paper together.

Rhonda then invited colleague Marja Kaunonen through ENTER – European network for education and training for research in mental health. Marja from Finland has a background in women's health and was interested. While working in New Zealand, Rhonda met Kerri-Ann, who was also interested in the topic of menopause and how New Zealand women were experiencing it.

Having research teams based in the United Kingdom, Finland, Australia and New Zealand seemed to strike a nice balance. Two countries from each hemisphere of the world with one large and one small country in each hemisphere.

Where are we up to?

UK – Data collection has been completed. Due to difficulties caused by COVID-19, the focus groups were held over Zoom and three sessions were needed to get enough participants. Data from 11 participants has been transcribed and researchers Camille and Gemma are familiarising themselves with it and developing codes and memos in an Excel spreadsheet.

Australia – Janene has prepared the ethics application and it is now in the first stage of its submission process at the University of Newcastle.

New Zealand – Ethics was approved by peer review as low risk. A flyer has been sent out to general hospitals seeking participants.

Finland – Ready to start data collection.

Project Publications

Cronin, C., Hungerford, C., & Wilson, R. L. (2020). Using Digital Health Technologies to Manage the Psychosocial Symptoms of Menopause in the Workplace: A Narrative Literature Review. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 1-8. doi:10.1080/01612840.2020.1827101
> Many women experience vasomotor, psychosocial, physical and sexual symptoms during their menopausal life-stage. Specifically, the psychosocial symptoms of menopause can include loss of confidence, issues with self-identity and body image, inattention and loss of memory, increased levels of stress, and a higher risk of developing anxiety and depression. In the workplace, such symptoms can impact the woman's capacity to perform to her optimal levels. Even so, many women do not seek help to manage their symptoms due to feelings of embarrassment, the possibility of experiencing adverse reactions from others, or the cultural taboos that are attached to the condition. Digital health technologies, including virtual consultations, therapeutic interventions, and participation in online communities of support, provide an important means by which women can obtain information about menopause. In the

field of mental health, digital technologies have an increasing evidence base. This paper considers how mental health practitioners can adapt, utilise or recommend digital health strategies to support older women in occupational settings to manage their psychosocial symptoms of menopause.

Contact Us

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Follow our project on ResearchGate here: https://www.researchgate.net/project/Digital-Health-Interventions-to-Women-in-Menopause