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Working through menopause with e-help

Newsletter #5 October 2021

A line in the sand



September's Zoom meeting with Kerri-Ann, Camille, Rhonda, Sara, Gemma, Janene and Marja (Jette absent)

The end is in sight for our data collection phase!

There are six countries in this international collaboration and some like the United Kingdom finished collecting data over a year ago and others like the USA and Australia are still on the treadmill of trying to gather up a total of ten participants across multiple focus groups. Rather than continue to hold the rest of the team up, we're drawing a line in the sand at the end of October so we can move on to analysing our collective data set and see what interesting insights it contains.

We didn't all start this research project at the same time, and we've been variously impacted by COVID-19. Heading into another northern hemisphere winter, the nursing workforce is feeling very, very tired and jaded. The United States has been hit hard this year. Sara from the University of South Carolina began recruiting in January, at a time when the USA was experiencing more than 3000 deaths per day and nurses in her country were stretched to the max, either at bedsides or on vaccination duties. Last month they were riding a new wave of infections, up to 170,000 new cases daily. Working long shifts clad in protective plastic, nurses have been frantically busy and the health system is running out of resources, Sara said at our team meeting on September 21.

Australia has also been slow in gathering its full complement of interviewees. After relaxing geographic and age constraints, Rhonda and Janene recruited six more nurses for the fourth focus group on October 11 but only three attended. Camille noted that one of the revelations of the study so far is how the menopausal transition extends both sides of the generally assumed 45-55 age range.

Where are we up to?

UK – In honour of World Menopause Day on October 18, Camille has organised speakers for a webinar session and a Menopause Café at the University of Essex extending across two days. A talk by specialist nurse Sally Roberts will focus on the physical, medical, mental health and hormonal therapy aspects of menopause. Another talk, by [#pausivity and #knowyourmenopause campaigner Clare Shepherd](#), will provide information and tools to help women be more aware of their symptoms and practical strategies to self-manage and seek help. The theme of World Menopause Day this year is bone health. Camille and Gemma continue to run their monthly MenoSupport WhatsApp sessions with former focus group participants.

The UK Parliament has been conducting a Menopause in the Workplace Inquiry and Camille submitted 3000 words before the closing date, based on the evidence she and Gemma have collected. The Inquiry is framed in the following terms:

Menopause and the workplace

Inquiry

A 2019 survey conducted by BUPA and the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that three in five menopausal women - usually aged between 45 and 55 - were negatively affected at work and that almost 900,000 women in the U.K. left their jobs over an undefined period of time because of menopausal symptoms. This could mean that women are leaving businesses “at the peak of their experience” which will “impact productivity”. Women in this age group are likely to be eligible for senior management roles, and so their exit can lessen diversity at executive levels. It can also contribute to the gender pay-gap and feed into a disparity in pensions.

Under the Equality Act 2010, menopause discrimination is largely covered under three protected characteristics: age, sex and disability discrimination. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 provides for safe working, which extends to the working conditions when experiencing menopausal symptoms. There have been several [calls](#) made for further legislation to require employers to put in place a workplace menopause policy to protect women going through the menopause against discrimination whilst at work.

The Government Equalities Office 2019 [‘roadmap’ on gender equality](#) commits the Government to conduct research into “what works to improve women’s reproductive health, across the life course” and “develop indicators relating to women’s health experience and impact on their work.” The Government has also recently sought views to help inform the development of a Women’s Health Strategy. This inquiry examines the extent of discrimination faced by menopausal people in the workplace, and investigates how Government policy and workplace practices can better support those experiencing menopause.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1416/menopause-and-the-%20workplace/>

Finland – Marja has been examining the literature on doing data analysis with selective translation of passages from the original language. Her focus groups were conducted in Finnish but the project team as a whole is working in English. Jette from Denmark will collaborate with her on this.

New Zealand – Kerri-Ann joined Camille and Gemma to present a paper on our research at the virtual Royal College of Nursing Conference, even though it began at 3am in the morning NZ time. It was her first RCN conference, and she thoroughly enjoyed the process of presenting, listening and networking online and thought the platform worked well. The NZ data is currently being linked to the UK and Finnish data.

America – Sara has collected data from six participants and has four more to meet with, but she has had to pause data collection because nurses are not available. She said that since July, participants have been saying they simply don't have the time to talk to her because they are facing horrendous workloads due to the Delta variant flareup in the US.

Australia – Rhonda and Janene have run focus groups with a total of eight participants. All sessions have been done via Zoom. Their whole state has been in lockdown for a month and finally case numbers are declining as more of the population receives vaccinations. Rhonda and other colleagues from her university have been out in the field, assisting with vaccination clinics targeting Australia's First Nations people.

Denmark – Jette has recently presented a poster on our research at a Nordic conference and is looking forward to adding her data to the set.

Project Publications – journal articles

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.

Project Publications - conference papers and posters

Cronin, C., Bidwell, G., & Hughes, K. (2021). Menopause in the nursing workplace: an international collaborative project. RCN International Nursing Research Conference, September 7-9, Bristol, UK.

Cronin, C., Bidwell, G., Carey, J., Donevant, S., Hughes, K., Kaunonen, M., Marcussen J., & Wilson, R. (2021). Digital therapeutics to support women in menopause: A narrative review. RCN International Nursing Research Conference, September 7-9, Bristol, UK.

Cronin, C., Bidwell, G., Carey, J., Donevant, S., Hughes, K., Kaunonen, M., Marcussen J., & Wilson, R. (2021). Menopause in the nursing workplace: an international collaborative project. Poster Presentation. British Menopause Society, 30th Annual Scientific Conference, June 1 to August 31.

Cronin, C., Bidwell, G., Carey, J., Donevant, S., Hughes, K., Kaunonen, M., Marcussen J., & Wilson, R. (2021). Digital Therapeutics to Support Women in Menopause: A narrative review. Poster presentation for Mental Health Awareness Week, May 10-14, University of Essex.

Wilson, R., Bidwell, G., Carey, J., Cronin, C., Donevant, S., Hughes, K., Kaunonen, M., & Marcussen J. (2021). Digital Therapeutics to Support Women in Menopause: A narrative review. Poster presentation. 5th Australian Nursing and Midwifery Conference, Newcastle, Australia, May 6-7.

Contact Us

Professor Rhonda Wilson, School of Nursing & Midwifery | Faculty of Health & Medicine
University of Newcastle, Australia. Email: Rhonda.Wilson@newcastle.edu.au

Facebook: [@digitaltherapeutics4menopause](https://www.facebook.com/digitaltherapeutics4menopause) Twitter: @rhondawilsonmhn

Twitter list: @rhondawilsonmhn/menopause

Dr Camille Cronin, School of Health and Social Care, University of Essex, United Kingdom. Email: Camille.Cronin@essex.ac.uk Twitter: @camillecronin

