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## Mind the Gap . . . in your knowledge: URGENT NEED TO EDUCATE WOMEN AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS IN GOOD HEALTH POST 50

For immediate release

The British Menopause Society (BMS), has today launched its 'Mind the Gap' campaign to over 250 healthcare professionals at the annual conference in Harrogate. This campaign aims to drive forward an urgently needed boost to the education of women and their carers about the specific needs of women during the menopause and in the following decades.

The campaign comes ahead of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) plan to release a guideline into the management of the menopause in July 2015. The BMS is gravely concerned that without the right preparation the NHS may not have adequate knowledge and capacity for the thousands of women who will, quite rightly, seek help and advice upon the publication of this guidance.

It is an unavoidable fact that the population is growing in numbers. In 2003 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data showed that there were 10.8 million women over 50 years of age in the UK with a prediction that by 2031 there will be 14.3m. Over one third of these will be living perhaps half their life after the menopause with a life expectancy of 86 years of age for women, perhaps with a dwindling quality of life.

In 2002 a large study into hormone replacement therapy after the menopause, carried out by the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), suggested there were small but significant risks to women taking HRT. Since this study there has not only been a large-scale withdrawal of doctors prescribing HRT, but there has been a lack of prioritization in care professionals addressing the needs of women after the menopause. This has translated into women not visiting doctors when they need to.

Following the publication of the WHI study there has been confusion as the authors have updated their results on many occasions, resulting in a reduction in the significance of many of the outcomes they studied. In fact were that study published afresh there would be far less impact on postmenopausal women today. [1] The UK-wide confusion about menopause management has been further worsened because information about HRT from UK regulators such as the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has also not been updated.

The reality we must address from all this confusion is that nearly a generation of specialists, GPs and nurses could have been making recommendations using outdated advice. It is therefore only with properly educated doctors, nurses and patients that steps can be taken to improve quality of life, fitness and longevity without the need for prescribable drugs if only women were encouraged to visit their GP around the menopause as the BMS recommended to the Department of Health in 2011. [2] HRT, if required and given to the right women at the right time for the correct duration may have significant long term benefits sustainable for years after stopping HRT. Only fully up to date doctors and nurses will be able to do this.

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Edward Morris, Chairman of the BMS said at the launch of the 'Mind the Gap' campaign. "The gap that we need to close is a 10 year gap of knowledge of how to look after women during the decades after the menopause. The BMS, along with its patient arm, Women's Health Concern, has planned a nationwide campaign of accredited educational meetings and seminars for doctors and nurses, along with evening meetings for patients.

It is time to end the taboo of talking about the menopause with the worries around the mixed messages about HRT. It is time to move towards a holistic and integrated approach to modern health care after the menopause where those giving advice are fully educated, up to date and able to support women through the decisions they make."

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**Harrogate, 27th June 2014**

**Notes to Editors:**

The **British Menopause Society** (BMS): provides education, information and guidance to healthcare professionals specialising in all aspects of post reproductive health. This is achieved through lectures, conferences, meetings, exhibitions and publications, including its journal, Menopause International.

In July 2012, the BMS acquired the charity, Women's Health Concern, which has been fully integrated as its patient arm. **Women's Health Concern** (WHC) provides an independent service to advise, reassure and educate women of all ages about their health, wellbeing and lifestyle concerns, to enable them to work in partnership with their own medical practitioners and health advisers. WHC offers unbiased information – by telephone, email, in print, online and through conferences, seminars and symposia.

The BMS is currently performing an international web based survey into the Awareness and Knowledge of the menopause. <http://menopausematters.co.uk/q14>

**References:**

1. Shapiro et al Risks and benefits of hormone therapy: has medical dogma now been overturned? Climacteric 2014; 17:215–222
2. Modernizing the NHS: observations and recommendations from the British Menopause Society. Menopause Int. 2011 Jun; 17(2)

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