

CMS Response to Lancet Series on Menopause

The Canadian Menopause Society (CMS) is aware of the Lancet series which was recently published on menopause, as well as the media attention it is receiving on over-medicalization of menopause. The concern expressed by the authors of the first article (*An empowerment model for managing menopause*) is that following a disease based model for menopause is not reality as it is a natural process of ageing.¹ The authors stress that the medicalized view on menopause can be disempowering for women.¹ The authors also indicate in the article that women want their voices heard and their experiences validated.¹ For those of us who provide care for midlife women, we know that the reality of menopause is complex and it is an individual experience. Menopause is a natural process of ovarian aging and the decline in the hormones, estrogen and progesterone. Perimenopause is the time leading up to the menopause when the hormones are fluctuating. Menopause can also be induced through surgery, chemotherapy or radiation.

Up to 75% of women will experience some degree of menopausal symptoms during the menopause transition, however for some women it will be mild and manageable. While others will struggle with severe symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, sleep issues, mood issues including anxiety or depressive symptoms, brain fog and vaginal dryness which can affect their daily function and quality of life. Unfortunately for too long women's symptoms and concerns have been dismissed or ignored. The impact of symptoms for those who suffer can not be underestimated. Access to menopause care has been an issue in Canada. This was highlighted in the Menopause Foundation of Canada report *The Silence and the Stigma* in 2022. In the survey of over 1000 Canadian women one in two felt unprepared for menopause and 4 in 10 felt alone.² Because of the lack of access to care and quality evidence based information, women become vulnerable looking for their own solutions. They can easily become targets for products or supplements making claims that do not have the evidence to support their use. The commercialization and promotion to vulnerable women provides an environment of misinformation which makes it difficult to distinguish the evidence and creates distrust in the system.

Many women will go through menopause without the need for medications, but some will experience symptoms that affect their quality of life. These women should feel empowered to share their symptoms with their health care providers and be provided with all the evidence-based options including medications such as menopausal hormone therapy (MHT), non-hormonal prescription options, as well as lifestyle and complementary therapies. Not all women will need MHT but those who do should feel comfortable in starting it for bothersome menopausal symptoms. MHT can be safely started in women who are less than 60 years of age or less than 10 years postmenopause and who have no contraindications.³ MHT is the most effective option for symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats. It can also help with sleep

issues, mood symptoms, vaginal dryness and prevent bone loss. We need to dispel away the fear of menopause symptoms, the fear of MHT and the fear of being stigmatized. We need to openly discuss symptoms and listen to and hear what women are telling us. The time is **NOT** now to use words like “medicalization” or “overmedicalization”. The time is **NOW** to validate a woman’s experience of menopause and not dismiss their symptoms.

The Canadian Menopause Society is committed to providing evidence based information and education to women and health care providers about menopause. For further information access the Canadian Menopause Society website <https://www.sigmamenopause.com/>.

Resources for information about menopause:

Canadian Menopause Society: <https://www.sigmamenopause.com/>

Menopause Foundation of Canada: <https://menopausefoundationcanada.ca/>

Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology of Canada: <https://www.menopauseandu.ca/>

The Menopause Society: <https://www.menopause.org/>

International Menopause Society: <https://www.imsociety.org/>

References:

1. Hickey M, LaCroix AZ, Doust J, et al. An empowerment model for managing menopause. *The Lancet*. 2024;doi:10.1016/s0140-6736(23)02799-x
2. Menopause Foundation of Canada.
<https://menopausefoundationcanada.ca/menopause-in-canada-report/#2022report>
3. Yuksel N, Evaniuk D, Huang L, et al. Guideline No. 422a: Menopause: Vasomotor Symptoms, Prescription Therapeutic Agents, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Nutrition, and Lifestyle. *J Obstet Gynaecol Can*. Oct 2021;43(10):1188-1204 e1.