

# A change for the better

In the second in our series on subspecialties, we speak to **Kathy Abernethy**, chair of the British Menopause Society

**T**HE MENOPAUSE specialism has changed a lot since the British Menopause Society was set up in 1989, says Kathy Abernethy, its current chair and one of its founding members.

“Today, women are much more aware of the menopause and want to take positive steps to help themselves through it,” she says. “At the beginning, it was more about us telling women what they needed to be doing. Now we’re working in partnership with women.” In 2012, the society brought an existing charity, Women’s Health Concern, under its umbrella – this has now become its patient arm.

### Growing numbers

Kathy is a clinical nurse specialist who has worked in menopause for more than 25 years. “The society has 700 members now,” she says. “We have a lot of gynaecologists but also medics from all specialties: nurses, psychiatrists, pharmacists. The society was always intended to be multidisciplinary,

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which was why I was invited to be involved initially.”

### Working together

Collaboration is the society’s watchword. “We worked with the Royal College of Nursing on a publication about menopause specialist nurses, and with the RCOG’s Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare on the Special Skills Module leading to a Certificate in Menopause Care at basic or advanced level. Our website is full of tools and guidance for any healthcare professionals working in post-reproductive health,” she says. The society has a Medline-indexed quarterly journal, *Post Reproductive Health*, and organises meetings and conferences throughout the year and symposia all over the world.

“People forget that women can go through the menopause at any age, and a lot of our work is helping healthcare professionals to help women,” Kathy says. “Most women will manage their menopause without any help or medical intervention, but we’re concerned about those who do need that help.”

Another big change Kathy has seen during her time as a practitioner is public attitudes towards menopause. “The headlines in the press in 2002 and 2004 were basically that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) would kill you,” she says. “There was negative and often misleading reporting of the research at the time. An important recent follow-up study of the same study has shown that HRT used



**ABOVE**  
Kathy Abernethy (left)  
**BELOW** Dr Robert Langer delivers the BMS annual lecture

**Summary**  
The WHI was inspired by strong and consistent results in studies of women initiating HRT relatively early in menopause, with long-term exposure, that suggested HRT could prevent major age-related diseases  
On that basis, the WHI was designed to test benefit in older women in whom risk factor loading was considerably greater  
**Benefit was not found...**  
... but the results were interpreted as proving that all of the prior work was wrong ... and wrongly applied back to women like those who inspired the study ... ultimately causing harm

### DID YOU KNOW?

**700**

members within the British Menopause Society



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for five to seven years is not linked to premature death. The press has picked up on that and the reporting has been much more positive.”

### Breaking the taboo

There is still work to be done, however, to remove the taboos and stigma attached to talking about menopause. “One of my jobs outside of my clinical practice is to go into workplaces to talk about the menopause,” Kathy says. “I run two sessions in each location: one for women and one for managers about their obligations as an employer.

“In the women’s session, they are overflowing with questions and are so grateful for the opportunity for menopause to be recognised at work. Women are working longer now, and there’s evidence that women struggle with the menopause at work. In the managers’ sessions, they tend to just sit there quietly. It shows that we haven’t quite created the culture where the menopause is talked about openly and seriously – but we are making progress.”

### FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- British Menopause Society: [thebms.org.uk](http://thebms.org.uk)
- 2018 BMS annual conference, London: [thebms.org.uk/meeting/bms-28th-annual-conference](http://thebms.org.uk/meeting/bms-28th-annual-conference)
- Women’s Health Concern: [womens-health-concern.org](http://womens-health-concern.org)
- The British Menopause Society and Faculty of Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare’s Special Skills Module in menopause care: [tinyurl.com/BMSmodule](http://tinyurl.com/BMSmodule)
- The RCOG’s Advanced Training Skills Module in menopause: [tinyurl.com/RCOGmodule](http://tinyurl.com/RCOGmodule)

### FIND OUT MORE

## BMS vision

In July, the BMS introduced the ‘BMS vision for menopause care’, outlining the ideal in post-reproductive care: to improve access for all women to information and, where appropriate, treatment, at the time of the menopause and in the years beyond. It was launched at the society’s 2017 annual conference then published in *Post Reproductive Health*. Read it in full at [tinyurl.com/BMSVision2017](http://tinyurl.com/BMSVision2017)

### Its three main areas of focus are:

- 1 The patient experience** – ensuring women have access to a wide range of types of information and can see a suitably trained healthcare practitioner to discuss their experience of menopause and the options available to them.
- 2 A well-educated workforce** – making sure they are ‘vision-ready’ with the optimum skill mix to cater for a wide population demand.

- 3 Integrated care** – establishing clear referral pathways between services so that care can be integrated around the needs of the individual, not disjointed by institutional or professional silos.

**“The BMS vision sets out the fundamental principles that should underpin menopause care provision for all”**

**Here is an excerpt:** “Cuts to NHS budgets are creating a climate of uncertainty surrounding menopause service provision, yet the effects of menopause on quality of life and health in an ageing population are becoming increasingly apparent. The British Menopause Society vision sets out the fundamental principles that should underpin menopause care provision for all to ensure providers and commissioners are held to account and service users can access high-quality menopause care as standard. The vision is designed to demonstrate that good menopause care is key to healthy lives in middle and later years.”

