

# Hormone Replacement Therapy Myth Busting

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LSBU Non Medical Prescribers Conference 2020

# What is a myth: The 'menopausal woman'

## A women first : menopause second

### **Contemporary:** A widely held but false belief or idea

- Only affects older women
- Anti-depressants should be prescribed for depression
- HRT is not safe and should only be prescribed for a maximum of 10 years
- HRT is contraindicated in migraine and breast cancer
- Bioidentical HRT is risk free and not available on the NHS
- All HRT is the same
- Work place adjustments are not needed

### **Archaic:** A traditional story explaining a natural or social phenomenon typically involving supernatural beings or events

- It is a natural event
- Affects a woman's social role and marriageability
- She is an old women
- She does not want sex
- She has great powers – witches, healers, wise, matriarch
- She can bear children
- She is past her prime

# What prejudices do we bring to a consultation



- What do you see
- What is most important to whom and why
- Do you seeing an individual or a statistic

# Impressions are made in the first 30 seconds



I feel depressed

Oh ..... and my periods are irregular

# The menopause has no respect for age

## Diagnosis is not always obvious

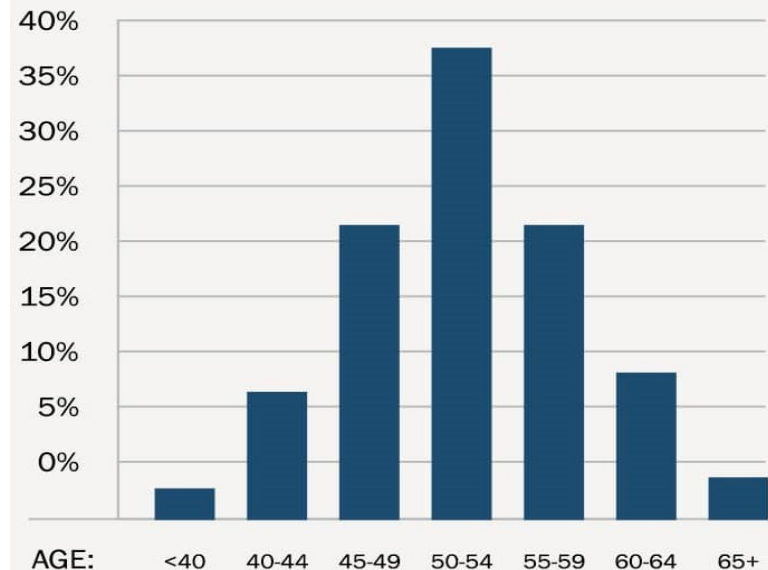
- Menopause – last menstrual period
- Retrospective diagnosis
  - Iatrogenic, spontaneous, primary amenorrhoea

### Age and sex is no predictor

- Survival of cancer treatments
- Amenorrhoea post contraception use
- Longer life expectancy with comorbidities
- Gender fluidity and transgender



Percentage of Women Experiencing Menopause Symptoms by Age



# Terminology at age of diagnosis

- **Premature ovarian insufficiency (POI):** < age 40.  
[www.daisynetwork.org.uk](http://www.daisynetwork.org.uk)
- **Early menopause:** between age 40-45
- **Perimenopause:** symptomatic time around or leading up to last the period
- **Menopause:** average age 51
- **Postmenopause:** > age 40, 12 months amenorrhoea
- **Climacteric:** > age 40, epoch around the menopause

# Making a diagnosis

## Under age 45

- History taking - exclude other causes
- Low index of suspicion
- LH/FSH, estradiol

## FSRH: Contraception for women aged over 40

[www.fsrh.org](http://www.fsrh.org)



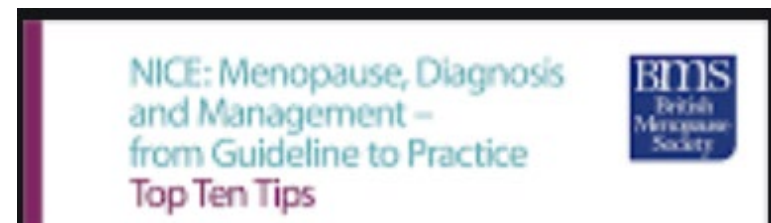
## Over age 45

- History taking - exclude other causes
- **Blood tests not indicated**

## NICE: Diagnosis and management of the menopause

[www.nice.org](http://www.nice.org)

[www.thebms.org](http://www.thebms.org)



# Depression and the menopause

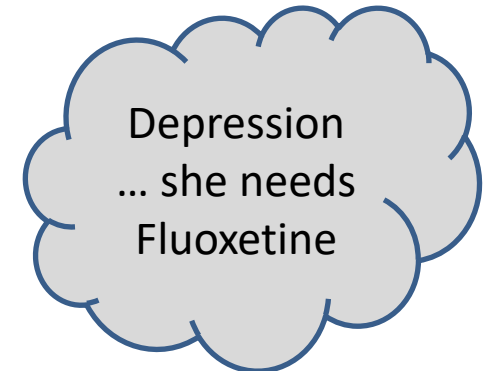
## NICE Guideline: Diagnosing and Managing the Menopause

### Expert Patient - Informed choice

- Discuss RISKS versus BENFITS
- Individualise treatment

### NICE Guideline

- FSH not needed to diagnose over age 45
- Most women's symptoms disappear within 5 years of the menopause
- **Do not routinely offer SSRIs, SNRIs or clonidine as first-line treatment for vasomotor symptoms alone**
- HRT licensed for symptomatic menopausal women & osteoporosis
- No age limit, no time limit for HRT use
- Guideline age range is up to 60 years of age







‘My friend is on  
compounded  
bioidentical HRT’

Bioidentical  
HRT is  
‘Safe’

It’s made  
especially  
for me

Based on  
my blood  
tests or  
salivary  
tests

And  
bioidentical  
HRT is not  
available  
on the NHS

# Discussing Risks and Benefits

## The patient expert : Informed consent

2002

WHI study resulted  
in 50% of women  
world wide stopping  
HRT for fear of  
unacceptable risks

Sept 2017

WHI concluded  
most women will  
longer healthier  
lives on HRT than  
those who do not  
take HRT

J. Manson *et al.* Menopausal hormone  
therapy and long-term all-cause and  
cause-specific mortality. *JAMA*. Vol.

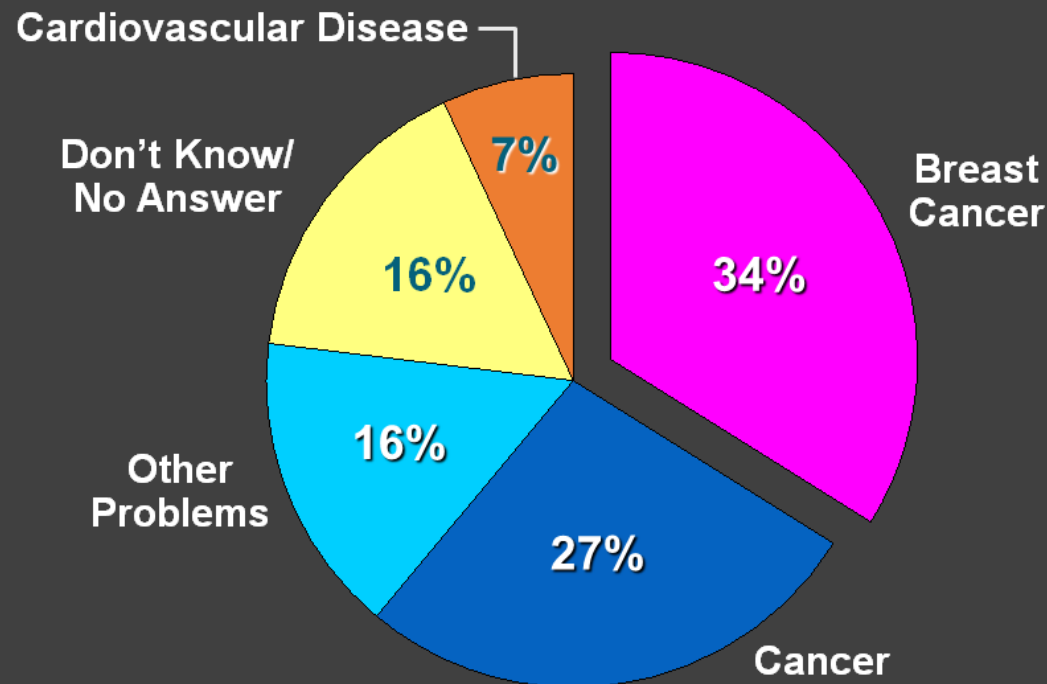


# Bioidentical – Not all HRT is the same

- **Licensed:** Regulated by the MHRA
- **Unlicensed:** neither licensed drug or licensed use  
e.g. hormone implants (+/- scientific safety data)
- **Off label:** unlicensed use of a licensed medication  
e.g. in Premenstrual Syndromes
- **Compounded:** a personalised bespoke formulation  
e.g. natural bioidentical hormones (no efficiency or safety scientific data)

# Bioidentical HRT : Breast cancer

## Women's Perceptions of Their Greatest Health Problems



Adapted from Mosca L, et al. *Arch Fam Med*. 2000;9:506-15.

# HRT safety

## Breast cancer risks

BMS: Difference in breast cancer incidence per 1,000 women aged 50-59.

Approximate number of women developing breast cancer over the next five years.

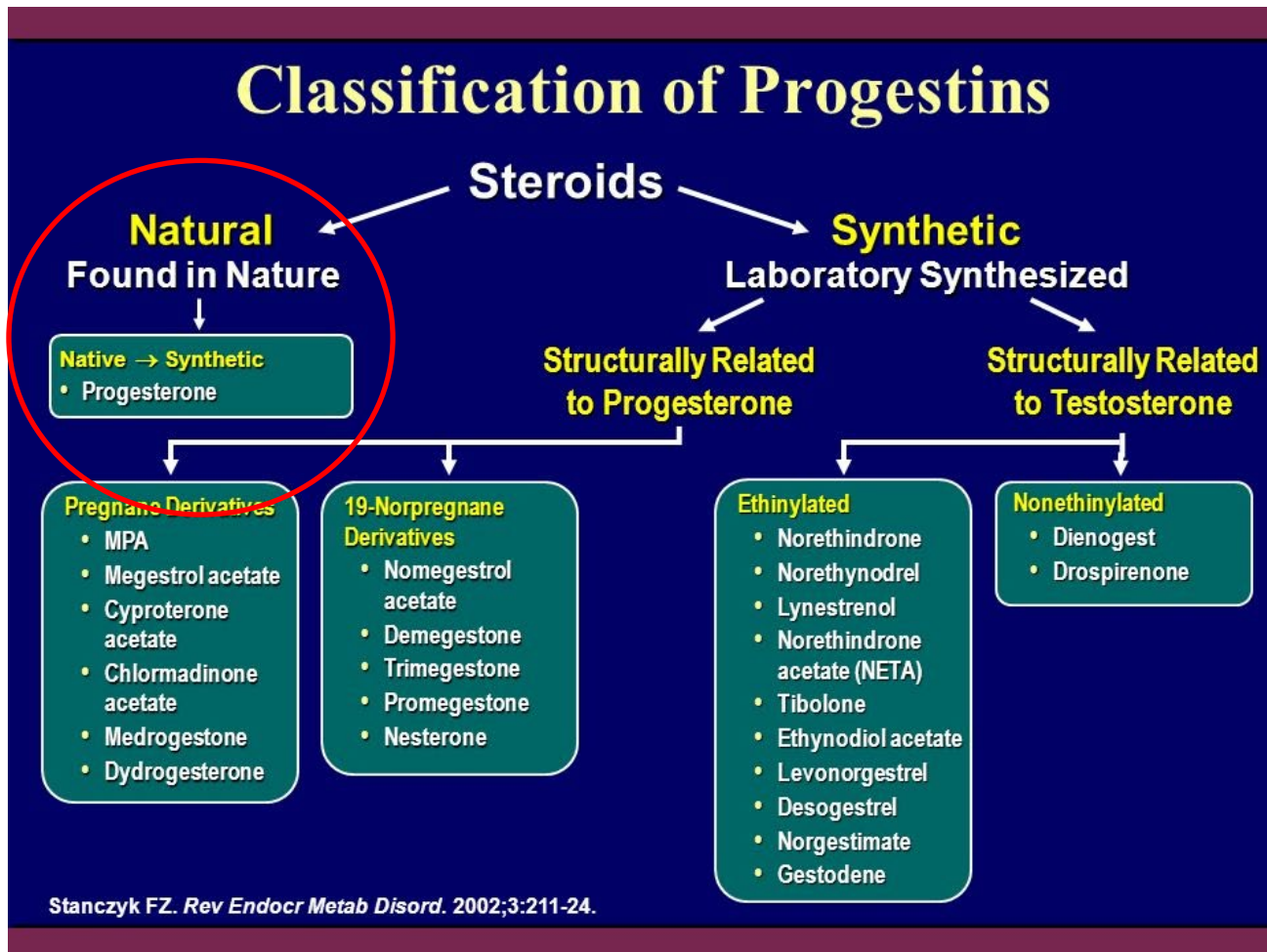
[www.thebms.org.uk](http://www.thebms.org.uk)





# Different progestogens have different class effects

Progestogenic Side-effects (PMS)



Androgenic side-effects (hirsutism, acne, clotting)

(USA) Norethinodrone = Norethisterone (UK)

# Synthetic v Natural Bioidentical

## Type of hormone matters

	Synthetic	Natural bioidentical
Combined oral contraception*	Yes	No
Ethinyl estradiol	Yes	No
Estradiol, estriol	No	Yes
Progestogen, progestin	Yes	No
Progesterone	No	Yes
Equine estrogen	No	Yes

### **Equine estrogens:** PREgant Mares urINe – PREMARIN

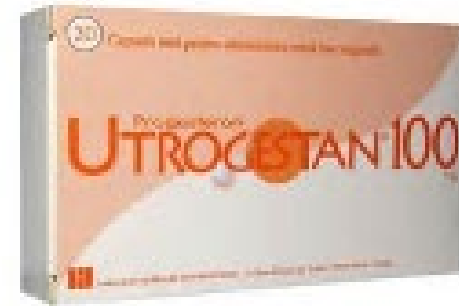
- Natural bioidentical hormones for horses, just not women! – but has it's place

\* Excluding: Qlaira and Zoley

# Progesterone

## Benefits

- Available as synthetic or natural, bioidentical
- Protects against endometrial cancer
- Regulates bleeding
- NATURAL progesterone reduces anxiety, improves sleep
- NATURAL progesterone reduces breast cancer risk



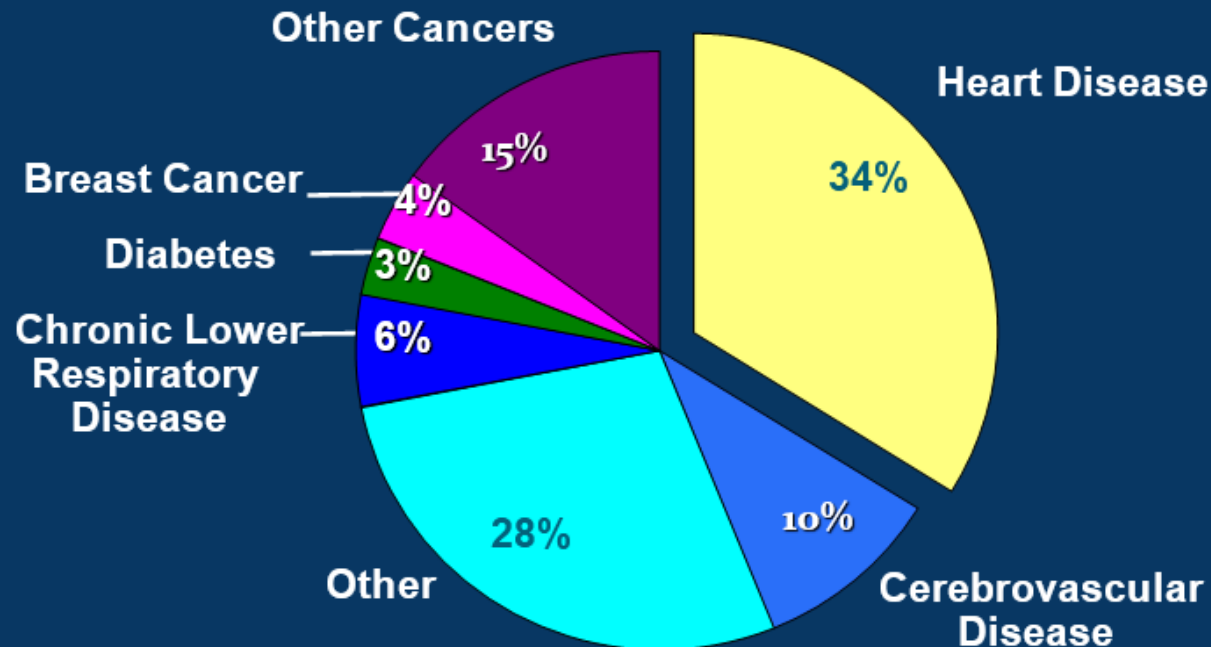
## Risks

- May cause breast tenderness
- May cause PMS type side effects
- SYNTHETIC progestogens increase breast cancer risk



# Bioidentical HRT : Cardiovascular

CHD morbidity and mortality significantly increases post menopausal women\*



\* Percentage of total deaths in 1999 among women aged 65 years and older.  
Anderson RN. *Natl Vital Stat Rep.* 2001;49:1-13.

# COCP v HRT

## Route of administration matters

Hormone preparations	VTE, stroke	Breast cancer
<b>Combine contraceptive pill</b> (synthetic hormones)	Yes	Yes
<b>Combined HRT</b> (oral estradiol + synthetic progestogen)	Yes	Yes
<b>Bioidentical HRT</b> (transdermal estradiol +/- natural progesterone)	No	No

### Oral estradiol

- Increase hepatic clotting factors and VTE risk

### Transdermal estradiol

- Avoids oral first pass effect
- Does not increase hepatic clotting factors or VTE risk

# HRT for life

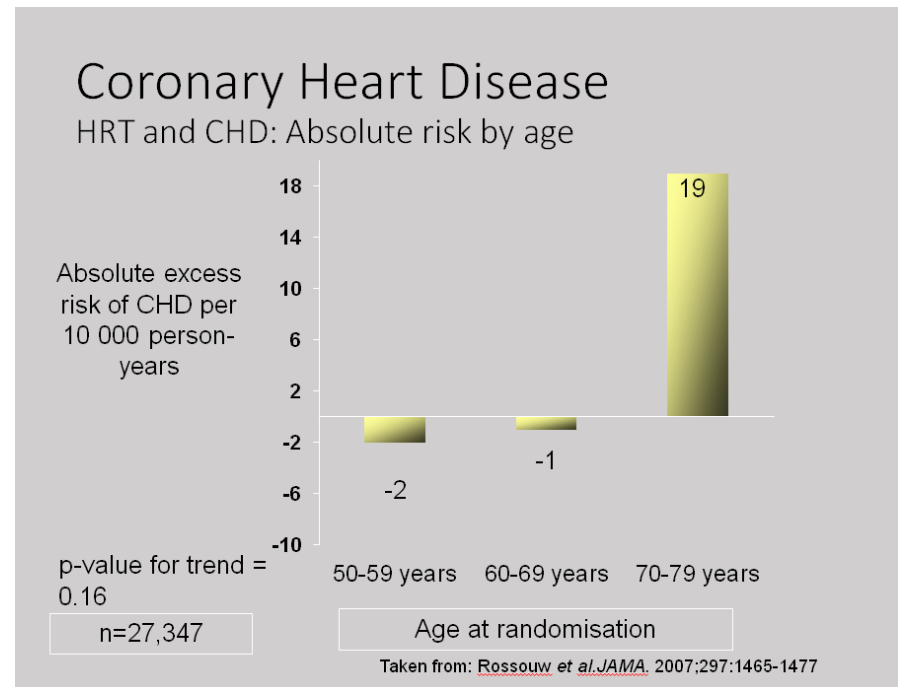
## Window of opportunity

**Can only be used for 10 years – FALSE**

**HRT should only be discontinued if risks outweigh individual benefit**

**Licensed indication: symptom relief and bone protection**

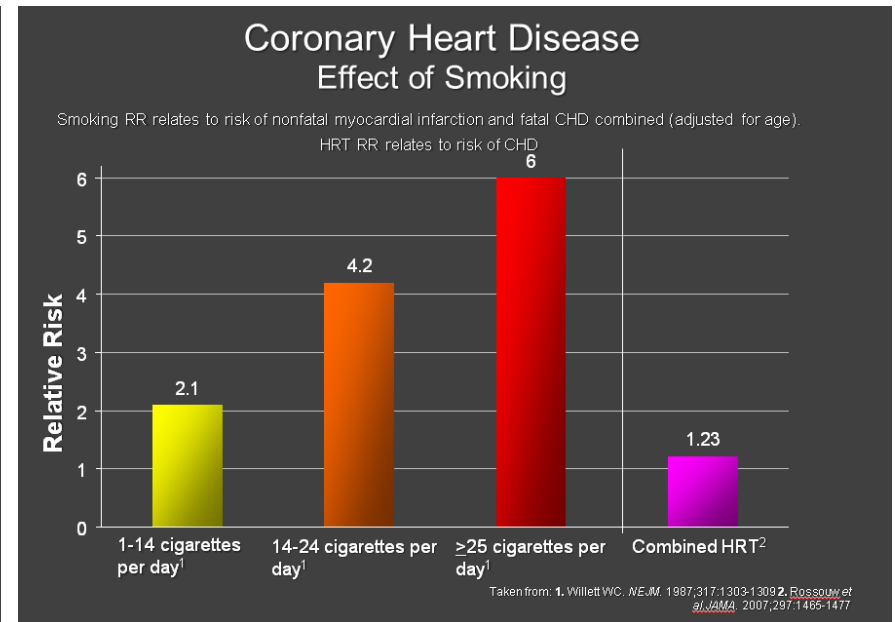
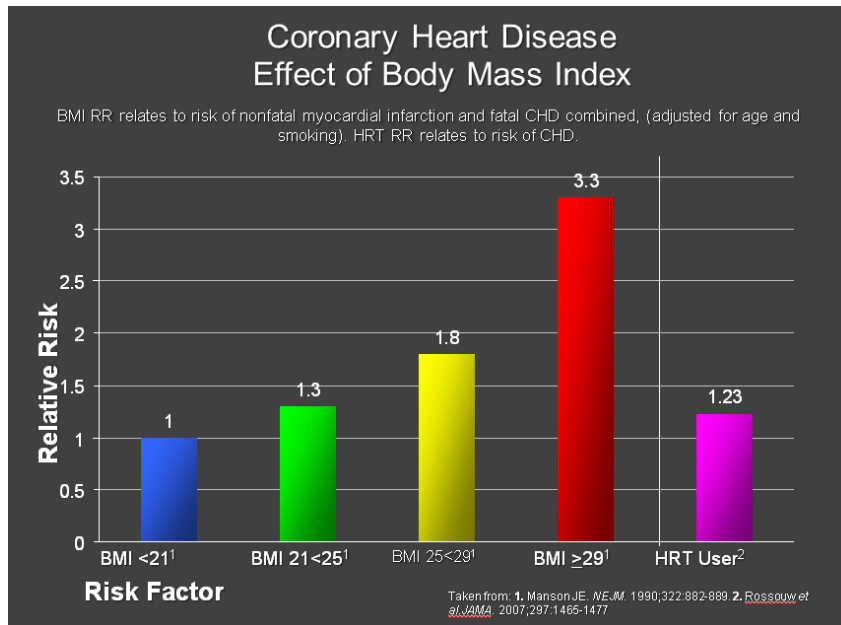
- R&B determined by age of starting treatment
- Under 45, HRT should be continued until at least 51-55
- HRT should be started within 5 years of the menopause
- There is no age cut of HRT use
- Indications for HRT may last a lifetime



# HRT safety

Co-morbidities and lifestyle a greater risk to health than HRT

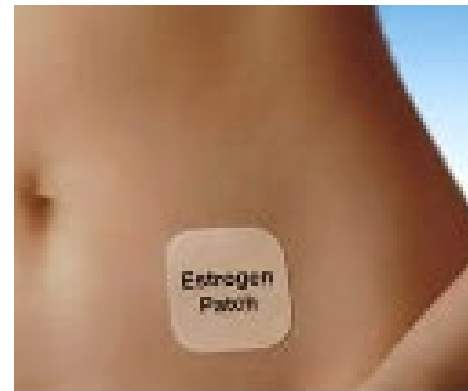
- Obesity a national epidemic
- More women than ever smoke and numbers increasing



# Estrogen

## Benefits

- Naturel, bioidentical
- 'Oil' to the body
- Treats menopause symptoms
- Protects against osteoporosis, Alzheimer's, coronary heart disease
- Improves skin and collagen
- Improves vaginal and bladder health
- Reduces anxiety and depression



## Risks

- ORAL estrogen increase strokes and clots risks
- ORAL estrogen reduces libido

# Premenstrual Syndromes

HRT: Not just for the menopause - off-label prescribing

## Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

- Recognised condition by World Health Organisation (WHO)

## Premenstrual dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)

- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association)

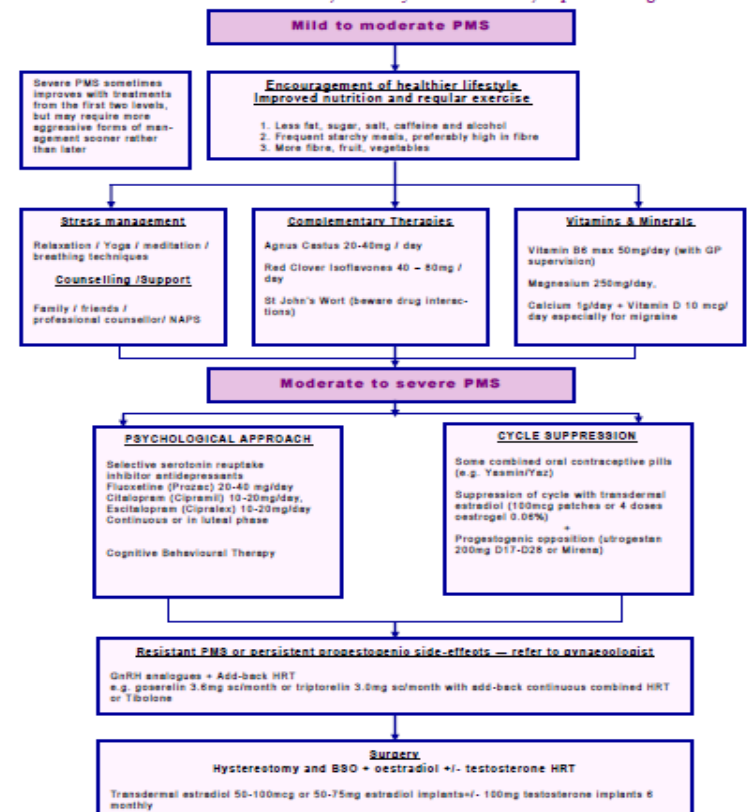
## National Association for PMS (NAPS)

- Management guidelines

### Treatment guidelines for PMS

Nick Panay BSc MRCOG MFSRH

Chairman of the National Association for Premenstrual Syndrome, Director of West London Menopause & PMS Centre, Consultant Gynaecologist Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust & Chelsea and Westminster NHS Foundation Trust, Honorary Senior Lecturer, Imperial College London



# The untold story



- Heart
- Head
- Hormones

## Libido

- Vaginal Dryness
- Vaginal atrophy
- Painful sex
- Lack of interest / desire / fantasies
- Unable to orgasm
- Partner issues
- Body image

# Testosterone

## Benefits

- Natural, body identical
- Improves metabolism, energy levels, libido
- Improves joint pain, muscle aches, headaches
- Improves depression



## Risks

- Hirsute, acne, alopecia
- CVS – insufficient data
- Breast – contraindicated in breast cancer



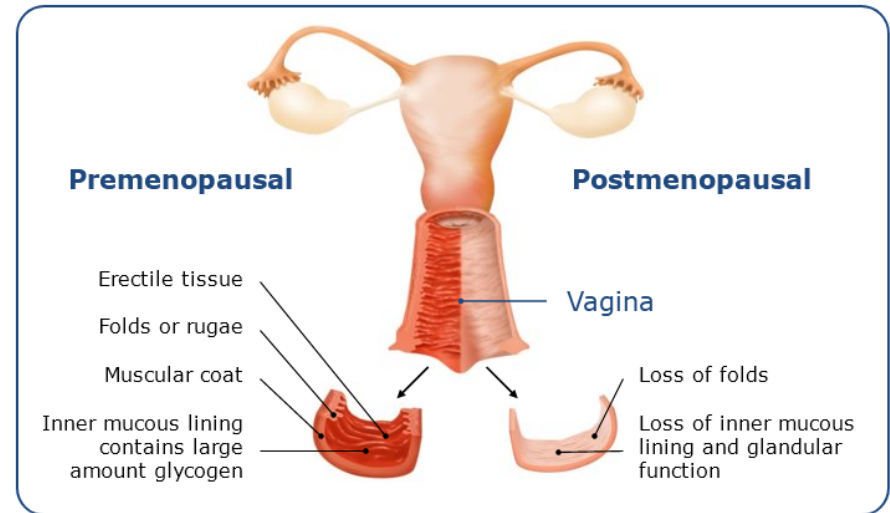
# Topical treatments

## Moisturisers & Lubricants

- Hydrates the vaginal tissue
- Improves sensitivity
- Reduces pain and discomfort
- Short term effect

## Vaginal estrogen

- Improves skin elasticity
- Improves lubrication, sensitivity
- Stimulates premenopausal tissue regeneration
- Does not increase HRT risks – negligible systemic absorption



Samsioe G, A profile of the Menopause 1995; 49 (Fig. 6.4)

# BMS: Menopause and the workplace guidance: what to consider

- 100% of women will experience the menopause
- Most women will spend up to 50 years of their life over the age of the menopause
- ONS: life expectancy to reach 100 by 2055

UK RETIREMENT AGE	
Now	65
2020	66
2028	67
2030s	68
2040s	69
2050s	70

Direct discrimination	This is when you're treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic; for example, if your local gym refuses to give you a membership because of your age.
Indirect discrimination	This is when a good or service has criteria which have the effect of being discriminatory against a person because of a protected characteristic like their age. For example, if you can pay for an item in instalments but only if you are working, this would disadvantage retired people.
Harassment	This is when you experience behaviour that makes you feel intimidated, humiliated, or degraded, or that creates a hostile environment. For example, if a nurse repeatedly makes offensive jokes about your age. This also applies to comments or jokes made about someone you associate with, such as a partner.
Victimisation	This is when you are treated unfairly as a result of making a complaint about discrimination or giving evidence when someone else makes a complaint.

## Equality Act 2010 (replacing the Disability Discrimination Act 1995)

- Has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities

# The myth is, there is no myth ..... just our lack of awareness

## These are real people with real stories

- Four of these individuals have gone through the menopause
- Three have had children
- One has '... no maternal instinct to have children'
- Two are already postmenopausal grandmothers
- One has had 4 heart attacks and still on HRT
- **All will have a menopause**



# Take home messages

- 40% of our expected life will be spent in the menopause
- We should expect healthy lives not just long lives
- The right prescription started at the right time can bring immediate and long-term health benefits
- Risks of HRT should be considered in the context of your health
- Bioidentical HRT is available on the NHS
- There is no time limit to using HRT
- Don't believe everything you read on the internet
- GIVE YOUR GP A COPY OF THE NICE GUIDELINE!

# Thank you

