**Podcast transcript**

**Series 2, Episode 2: Menopause in the workplace**

**Opening credit** Talking inclusion with Steven Copsey.

**Steven** Welcome to this month's episode of ‘Talking Inclusion with’ from Inclusive Employers. I'm Steven Copsey, Senior Consultant at Inclusive Employers and today we're going to be talking about menopause in the workplace.

We're going to talk about real life experience, why menopause is often an overlooked area of inclusion. And of course, we'll have expert advice on what employers should be doing to support their menopausal and Peri menopausal employees.

Before I introduce our guests, in case you don't know us, we're Inclusive Employers. Our mission is to make every workplace an Inclusive Employer where every colleague values differences, and can contribute their skills and experiences fully to their organisation.

These podcasts are for anyone who has an interest in inclusion and diversity. In our podcast we share life stories and experiences. Learn about best practice and hear practical advice for employers from our guests as well as Inclusive Employers, own inclusion and diversity experts.

Today I'm joined by Elaine Johnson, Director of People at Great Places Housing Group. Hi, Elaine.

**Elaine** Nice to be here.

**Steven** And we also have the fabulous Sharon Cooper, senior I&D consultant here at Inclusive Employers who's going to share her expert advice for employers today. Hello, Sharon.

**Sharon** Hi, Steven. Hi, Elaine.

**Steven** So let's get started. Menopause is often seen as a bit of a taboo, so much so that a survey done in 2020 reported that 32% of doctors are uncomfortable talking about the topic, yet it impacts around half of the population and almost a million women in the UK have left jobs because of menopausal symptoms. So Sharon, let's start with you. Can you give us a definition of menopause and perimenopause as well?

**Sharon** So menopause. It's a normal natural life event, it actually marks the permanent end of a person's potential fertility. And the thing I find most interesting is that menopause is actually only one day. So we talk about it like it's years, you know, it'll be years of somebody's life, but it's actually one day. And it's defined as the final day of the last menstrual period, and is usually confirmed when there's been no further periods for 12 months.

So what that means is it can happen and people don't know. So they might not know till years after they've actually had that that last period. So I think that's quite interesting. And probably a surprise to most people.

**Steven** Yeah, definitely. Because if we think of menopause, we're thinking of the whole after effects of that one day. That's a really interesting, Sharon. What about perimenopause.

**Sharon** So this is the period of time when the body starts to change in gradual transition between reproductive years and that day, that that day of menopause. And it's a phase where people start to experience lots of different symptoms and can be very unique to those individuals. But this perimenopause can actually last on average between four and six years. So probably when we're talking about menopause, most of the time, we're probably talking about the peri element of it, rather than that one day itself.

**Steven** Already I’ve learnt something new. I mentioned in the introduction, Sharon, that menopause is a bit of a taboo subject sometimes. Well, you know, whether that is because people feel uncomfortable to talk about it. They don't know what it is. Why do you think it is a bit of a taboo subject?

**Sharon** I think there's lots of different factors at play here, Steven, actually, but let's be honest, we're talking about periods here.. we’re talking about hormones. When do you hear those words in the workplace?

When do you hear them at home? Not very often, if we're honest, wrap that up with all the work that's happened in workplaces around gender equality, women getting in places in terms of their career in terms of their experiences, how they feel. I just think it's really multi layered and quite complex. But I think a lot of it comes down to we're talking about physical things here. We're talking about biological things and how they impact on individuals. And I just think they're things we're just not comfortable talking about.

 I think you're absolutely right there, even though might not be affecting men, that the likelihood is they have people in their lives who are going through this or will go through this at some point in their life. So why aren't they absolutely.

**Steven** Elaine? In your experience? Have you found that menopause is still quite taboo?

**Elaine** It's interesting, that conversation actually because yeah, it does really, really affect men, because usually they're on the receiving end of it.

And suddenly, you know, I didn't know the woman that lived with or the woman that like working with who's been confident, assertive able to deal with all sorts of things, multi-task. Y’know really, really sort of coping well with life suddenly isn't and I think men don't understand it.

And I think one of the other big factors, Sharon, on top of the ones that you mentioned is because we're women, and we're quite stoical about these things. And as women and mothers, you just get on with it, you just because you have to. That's the way. That's the way it's always been. And it's you. And as we know, a lot of women got other people before themselves, and they just keep carrying on, without actually even themselves coming to terms with what's happening to them, the changes that they're going through.

And for some people, they actually don't want to think about it, they don't want to accept it. So they close down thinking it's really not happening, it's really not happening. And so yeah, I think there's a lot of things going on.

But I think the great thing now is that we've actually opened this box, we’ve blown the doors off it, and we're talking about it. And certainly, you know, the last 12 months, the amount of times that menopause has actually been mentioned in workplaces, it's probably 10 times what it was mentioned in the 10 years before, because it is something we're starting to talk about. It is something that we're starting to really recognise is affecting people in workplaces. And that can only be a really good thing.

**Sharon** I agree. And I think there's another factor as well, isn't that the generation before us didn't speak about it, you know, talking about that being stoic and getting on with it. So there's lots of people now starting to experience that period menopause. And I'm like ‘What the heck's this’ - You know, my family didn't talk about it. I've not come in contact with people who've gone through this, am I on my own with it, because it's not part of that conversation?. So I think, yeah, absolutely. Seeing it on the television with there's been lots of documentaries, talking about it in the workplace, podcasts like this, are saying to people, you're not on your own. And I think that's really important.

**Elaine** Yeah, I mean, there's a whole role for Mums here, Mums of daughters to have those conversations. And one of the things I reflect on, and I do lose sleep over this, I'll be honest, you know, as a HR professional, early in my career, I can think very, very definitely, of two cases where I dealt with women in their 50s, who had been, you know, very competent, very capable women. And then things started to go wrong in their job role. And we dealt with it as a capability issue. And not once in any of those conversations was there the word menopause mentioned, was any anything, any sort of thought that that was what was happening? It was just actually, you know, something had happened, and, and this woman suddenly wasn't performing, and you know, both women ended up leaving their their jobs in quite difficult circumstances after a long year, you know, long years working with that employer.

I know, one of them, you know, several months after her marriage brokedown. At that time, you know, there was no thought of what was what was the sort of physiological problems behind that it was, we were just dealing with the capability problem. And you know, that was very unfortunate, but other things happened in their life. And I think now, and I know exactly what was happening in both of those women's lives, they were both going through menopause, and whether they realised it and didn't feel they could articulate it, or whether even they didn't recognise it, certainly, as a young HR professional wasn't on my radar at all. In my career.

That's two ladies, I can think of how many others have there been that have gone through that really traumatic situation of working for an organisation for a long time, things starting to go wrong, and then going through a capability process parting company with their employer. I mean, how traumatic has that been for so many women for so long. I’m just so pleased It's on our radar now we're talking about it, a nd actually, the more employers embrace it, hopefully, we're not going to have women go into that situation again,

**Steven** So Elaine, other than that capability, example you gave and thinking about the potential trauma, why is it so important to talk about menopause specifically, in a work context,

**Elaine** There's a few reasons why it's really important. I mean, the first one is to support your female employees. And actually, let's remember that some men go through this as well, particularly if they're going through treatment for prostate cancer and things. So the first thing is to support your sort of female employees as they go through that change in life, in exactly the same way that we support ladies that are going through maternity, and they have different needs it’s exactly the same.

We need to support women that are going through this process. It's very individual process for everybody and everybody, I think, as Sharon alluded to, goes through it and in a slightly different way, and it's really important that we understand what's happening and we give them support so that they can take and continue to contribute to the workplace and, and to perform in their job roles. So that that's one reason why it's really important.

The other reason is thinking about the people that they work with, because actually you know they, they are on the receiving end of perhaps, you know, a change in temperament or somebody that's not coping as well as they have done previously, or somebody that keeps forgetting things. And it's actually really important for that cohesiveness of the workplace, and for those relationships that other people appreciate it, and are supportive and understand what's going on as well.

So it is about it's fundamental, it's about being a good employer. And it's about making sure that you support employees at every part of their lives, and actually, if you do that, as we all know, as a good employer, that you get that back in people's loyalty and that performance, in how proud they are to work for that employer.

**Steven** Sharon, Elaine mentioned there, women go through menopause, we've got some men that might go through andropause as well. Obviously, there'll be trans men who may potentially go through menopause, non binary individuals, too. So when it comes to menopause, have we found that actually, this is a really overlooked area of inclusion that isn't being talked about, and do we think many organisations have these specific policies in place to help all of those people?

**Sharon** I think you're right, I think a lot of organisations do overlook it, and I think part of it is because it doesn't sit nicely in one of the protected characteristics. You know, we're talking about age here, we're talking about sex gender, we're talking about possible disability, you know, long term medical condition here. So because it doesn't always necessarily fit in nicely into a box, organisations are not sure how to start this conversation, should we even start it, y’know, is it a personal thing, we're gonna stay away from this. But absolutely, as Elaine said, then it impacts on how people feel and how they perform in the workplace.

I think many organisations don't have specific policies, but are starting to think about it, and I think even if it's not a specific policy, if it can be woven into things that are already there, and I think that's something to consider as well, sometimes having a specific policy makes it feel different makes it feel a bit scary, it makes it feel like something new, where managers got to learn, where let's use sickness absence reporting, is menopause one of the factors on there, is it on the list that colleagues and managers can choose as a reason for somebody being absent from work? If it's not, what are people choosing?

It’s hidden isn't it at the moment - If there isn't, you know, often they might go, I don't know, a guyny route, or they might just say, I've got a poorly tummy, you know, it might say something else. So it's been hidden and then managers aren't sure how to have that conversation, even if they've got an inkling that maybe menopause is that, how do I approach that conversation if the structures within the organisation aren't opening the door to that. Whereas if it's there, and there's some rationale behind that, hopefully, that can encourage people to start to have that conversation, but I think most organisations need to take a real look at that, just that as an example and think, Is it there, why not? Should we add it, you know, and then use that as a way to start the conversation?

**Elaine** Yeah, I would absolutely agree with that, Sharon, and because at the moment, as you say, people are not fit for work sometimes because of menopause. And actually, if they then feel that they can't bring in a notify that as the absence reason it gets hidden, and it stops a really positive conversation, carrying on.

One of the great things that has happened in the last few years with the advent of people working from home, is it does give women the chance to work from home at certain times. And I certainly know two or three women that are going through menopause, who have suddenly had very, very heavy periods. Now, if that happens in a workplace, I know one lady where it happened in a meeting, and she was sat on a chair and she she felt there was nothing she could do, and she literally had to sit there and wait for everybody to leave the room, and then was completely traumatised about what happened next. And I know she actually sat and waited for everyone to leave the office at the end of the day, and then took the chair home with her, and put it in a skip on the way home.

**Steven** Wow.

**Elaine** And you know, those are the positions that sometimes these women are in, but actually if women have the opportunity to work from home when those sorts of things happen, it's about dignity, isn't it we know it’s not good to be in that situation, not the person it's happening to or even that colleagues around. So you know, it's same sort of things that very practically employers can do, if they have those flexible ways of working, where you know, in terms of your sickness absence, you have that option for people to work from home, or they can ring in and be you know, they trust the organisation enough to be honest and say this is because I'm feeling menopausal, and one of the things we really have to avoid is we're just coming through and I think we're at the end of it now, all the sort of stigma attached to people ringing in with mental health because I think we've we've taken huge steps there.

What we've got to make sure we don't is have a similar stigma when people say and menopausal, that people then start to think, Oh, I've got a problem with this woman, she's going to have memory problems, she's not going to be quite as capable, she's not going to cope in quite the same way, she's going to get anxious about things that she's taken in astride all our working life. So I think there is something there that it's about trust that when people come forward and say those things, they know that employers is going to be supportive, and put those reasonable adjustments in place to allow them to continue to work, and not make something that they're going through even more of a problem.

**Steven** In order to highlight the challenges that many employees are facing everyday, we're now going to talk about experiences of the menopause. What symptoms do people have during the menopause? And what impact can that have on their working day? Elaine, can you tell us about your experience of the menopause?

**Elaine** Well, actually, I'm quite honest, I'm a little bit of a fraud, because actually, I never went through menopause. Because actually, I took an alternative route, which I wouldn't recommend for anybody, which was breast cancer. So as soon as I was diagnosed and went into chemo, obviously, my periods stopped and everything stopped.

But subsequent to that the medication that I went on to for what will be 10 years, eight years through, actually give you menopausal symptoms, so that's another thing to consider that if you've had ladies that have gone through breast cancer, they will because of the medication that there aren't going through those symptoms for for up to 10 years afterwards.

And some of them symptoms are, as I mentioned before, we call it brain fog, that where you can't think through things in quite the same way that you use do. I play tennis, and one of the first things I noticed is, whereas before I could read a game and knew where the ball was coming, I was already moving for the ball, once I saw it leave the other person's racket, I can't do that anymore, I don't read the game, my brain isn't working quite as quickly. And if you put that into a workplace scenario, you're in meetings, you're not actually taking information in in quite the same way, you're not making the connections in quite the same way. It's more difficult to think things through. And I think that's, that's one that a lot of people talk about.

Sleep, you know, you don't get a decent night's sleep, and we all know what it's like when you're tired, you don't perform quite the same at work, and added to that a lot of people have hot sweats during the night as well, which is really unpleasant.

And you know, people get to the stage when they've got to change their bedding in the middle of the night because they get so wet, and that obviously it also affects their relationship with then share that share in that bed.

There are other situations where you don't need to remember things in quite the same way, but I think one of the biggest things for me, is actually experiencing anxiety over things that in the past, you've always taken in your stride, things that you've been doing for years, you suddenly feel quite stressed and anxious about and you feel you can't cope and you can't deal with it in the same way.

So there's there's sort of the want of a better word for sort of mental symptoms, but there's also a lot of physical ones as well. Because what you will also find is there is a sort of drying out of the body. So a lot of ladies suffer with joint problems. If you look at the figures for the number of people that have frozen shoulders, for example, the highest majority of people are ladies in their 50s going through menopause, because of the effect that it has on joints.

So there's no sort of physical things as well, which you know, where you've got employees that are in physical jobs, that will affect their ability to do that. And we tend to think about it in terms of office based, but actually physically as well, there are those sort of symptoms as well. And then, of course, the one that I mentioned before, where people might not have had a period for a significant number of time and then suddenly start to experience very, very heavy periods and in an uncontrollable way, and that can be you know, it's no respecter of time, or location or even status in the organisation. It will just happen in very unfortunate circumstances. And that that can be one of the worst symptoms.

Sharon And I think that's one of the myths around this Elaine, because before I had the awareness train and before had got involved in these conversations, I just thought it was about period stopping. You know, I have no concept that things could get worse and more erratic around that. And I think from that organisational perspective, then there's some really simple things organisations can do. Have you got sanitary provision in your welfare facilities. You mentioned colleagues who work at home, which is great and can adapt their environments. But what about colleagues who don't have that option? Maybe more frontline manual workers Driving? You know, there's lots of careers out there. How are you supporting them around that, you know, is the sanitary provision available for them, is there opportunity for them to take a break that there's that safe space for them if they're not feeling well. So I think it's really important organisations think of all their colleagues and where they are and what the support can be for them.

I remember after we'd started the awareness of this, we put fans in our meeting rooms, just paper fans, the impact of putting just some fans in some meeting rooms was immense. First of all, it was a great conversation starter, why are these here, because we're supporting colleagues around menopause. But then the great thing with anything inclusion is you put one intervention in to help solve a particular, I don't want to say problem, but you know, a symptom in this case, or the people benefit as well, you know, other people who are just feeling hurt and need to cool down that fans there to help them. And I think that's the thing with a lot of this and you put those interventions in and actually, it can benefit everybody, not just the individuals who were who were feeling those menopausal symptoms.

**Elaine** Yeah, it was similar with the dark cardigans as well, wasn't it, in actually ladies toilets to have a long dark cardigan. Because then if somebody has had an issue when they need to get to their car quickly, you know, they can wrap it around them, and it doesn't look hard. But actually, that also helps young women as well, who equally can have that sort of issue that happens at work. So yeah, you're absolutely right. You know, these sorts of things are about everybody's dignity at work, and not just helping people in the first instance, you think you're supporting.

**Steven** I really love that idea of little paper fans. And that's actually something that I would have really appreciated at one point, because when I was 28, I went through a temporary andropause, and that was because I wasn't eating properly, I wasn't exercising properly, I had essentially a hormonal imbalance, but I had all of those symptoms that Elaine was mentioning, in terms of hot sweats, not sleeping at night, getting anxious about everything crying at my desk, running to the toilets to go and cry, I just could not cope, and I thought I was going crazy. And you know, even going to the doctors, I'll be honest, wasn't that much of a help, because they didn't really point me in any direction, and it wasn't until I ended up going to a nutritionist, and they said, I think you've got some sort of hormonal imbalance. Let's reset that. And that's one thing with the andropause, as opposed to menopause is it's not irreversible, totally, you can reset it, you can get back on top of it relatively simple in comparison. But I know just for those few months experiencing a fraction of what some people who go through menopause do, it was extremely difficult to deal with. So I don't know how people cope with that, when that's, you know, extended over a period of years sometimes. So absolutely that support there from an employer perspective, so important.

**Elaine** But also what you know what you said that people do feel like they're going crazy, you do feel like you totally losing the plots. And actually, what doesn't help is actually lots of people say that to you as well, like, what's the matter with you, you've lost the plot, you know, and that's where the support of colleagues and supportive family members becomes really important. And, you know, there's a there's a role for everybody in understanding this and helping people get through it.

**Steven** We've mentioned a few points there, dark cardigans, paper fans, Have either of you got any other examples where employees have made real differences by being supportive?

**Elaine** I think one of the big things is to have the conversation to actually make it part of discussions at work, you know, to actually throw some light and air on it and have some of those conversations.

Because that, you know, just that in itself goes a long way to normalising it, and people realising that it is, as Sharon said, right at the very beginning, a very normal and natural process that people go through.

I think the other really important thing is training for managers, because and particularly sometimes male managers to understand and to break down. Where do you use it beginning something taboos that it's okay to talk about this. It's okay, if you've got a lady in her 50s that suddenly you've noticed some behavioural change. It's okay to have that conversation. It's okay to start that discussion, because she might be waiting for it, but it's how it's done. It's like everything else is not what you do. It's how you do it. And I think having the training giving managers the confidence to be able to manage these situations and support these situations is really critical. Get yourself informed. Make sure you know what the situation is.

**Sharon** I think support networks as well. So we know, employee group staff networks can be really powerful for in many areas of inclusion, and I think menopause is one of those. So can you get people together who can be that support network, who may be going through it and want to share, you know, their experiences and want to share what they've tried what works, maybe what hasn't, because as we've talked about through this, it's a very individual experience, and what works for one won't work for another, but sharing that in that far room is so powerful.

I mean, I recall a colleague who was incredibly stressed, was struggling with work, getting very upset and kind of rang me in desperation, whilst desperation, you know, they didn't know where to turn. And I was able to signpost them to our support group, who were immediately supported them, shared lots of best practice, gave them lots of ideas, and it helped that person not just in the workplace, but in their personal life as well. And isn't that what we want, you know, support networks to do.

**Steven** There was a 2019 survey by news and health that found that 90% of respondents felt that their menopausal or peri menopausal symptoms were having a negative impact on their work, we've heard firsthand how incredibly impactful some of those symptoms can be.

So what can employers do? How can we support menopausal employees better? Sharon, let's start with you. What advice do you give to inclusive employees members, but also other people who might be listening about the menopause?

**Sharon** I mean, we've touched on it already, but awareness and education is absolutely key here to managers. But if we can for our colleagues, you know, everybody's part of this competent, everybody's touched by this in some way or another. I think leaders leading from the front are the leaders within an organisation who are comfortable and open to share their experiences of this, to normalise it, to talk about the impact, to talk about how they have worked through it, if that's appropriate for them. I think that's really key. I think we need to think about language when we're talking about this. So we've touched already, you know, women, men, trans men, trans women, non binary individuals, you know, make sure our language is inclusive, so let's talk about colleagues, employees, staff, whichever terminology is right for your organisation. You know, that's really important as well. And then there's that policies and procedures part. Is it its own separate policy? Or can it be woven into what you have already to make it part of the culture to make it part of ‘this is how we do things here’.

I think for some managers, they need help having these conversations, this doesn't come naturally. We know that with the mental health conversations that have been happening. So are there frameworks and tools that can help them and at Inclusive Employers, we have inclusion past parts that I think are a really great tool to open up in terms of this conversation, but organisations might have their own communication guides and conversation frameworks that help them. But I think yeah, it's it's having those tools there that people could can access that, that people know were there and give them confidence to have these conversations.

**Steven** Elaine, what would have helped you more as you went through some of those symptoms? Is there anything that your employer at the time did to support you during those menopausal symptoms, or anything more they could have done?

**Elaine** I think very much what Sharon said there about opening it up, having those conversations in the workplace. It's a little bit like race, isn't it? We didn't take very seriously to white people started talking about race. It's the same with this. We're not going to take it seriously to men start talking about menopause, and I think it is, it is that thing that Sharon said their leaders leading from the front men talking about it, we talk about it in terms of women going through those symptoms, there will be lots of men in the workplace, worried about their wives, their sisters, their their daughters even, in terms of going through it.

So actually, it's about best practices with all these things. It's about inclusion, it's about everybody getting involved in the conversation, and it normalising the conversation, though, actually, it just becomes part of the way that we do things around here, the pardon of how we support our colleagues, how we work together as really cohesive communities in work, and that's what I would say is the most important thing in terms of how we go forward with this into the future.

**Steven** Sharon, you touched upon line managers briefly earlier. What role What responsibility do you think they have to play in driving this conversation, being more proactive in their understanding and promotion of menopause?

**Sharon** Think key, they're having those one to one. You hope they're having those one to one conversations with their colleagues, getting to know them on an individual basis, so picking up if there are those shifts in behaviour shifts in the way somebody's approaching work, shifts in performance, and having that open conversation there. Role Modelling behaviours. Let's talk about this as a wider team. Let's talk about these things that make us a little bit twitchy make us feel uncomfortable, and admit it makes us feel uncomfortable. That's fine. I don't know that I've ever been in a meeting and a man's talked about periods in front of me, but if they did you know what fair play to them, but there's nothing wrong with them saying, I'm not sure help me. So maybe there's a role there, you know, in terms of how can colleagues educate each other and educate managers around this?

Yeah, I think it is. It's that role modelling, having those conversations, and we talked about sickness absence earlier as well. They're the ones having those Return to Work conversations with colleagues. So they bring in this in there, they create an environment where people feel able to share, and I think they have a role in signposting. So we are not expecting managers to be experts.

You know, they listen to this podcast, and suddenly they know everything about menopause and peri-menopause, of course, now, but if they see somebody who seems like they’re struggle, they now need some help, do they know within the organisation where they can signpost them, you know, are there other employee assistance programmes or are there well being programmes? Can they go to HR to ask for help? So I think that joins up that education piece. It's not just about learning about the subject, it's what have we got as an organisation that can support our colleagues. So when I am presented with that, I'm in the best place possible to signpost them somewhere that's really going to have impact. And if those things aren't in place, challenge the organisation, if those places aren't there to signpost, have that conversation with the right people about how do we get these things in place?

**Steven** We've mentioned men a few times throughout the session today. What is their role, even if they're not line managers? What Should men be doing, y’know, other than educating themselves? How can we get them more engaged in this subject and getting them to be real advocates of talking about menopause.

**Elaine** Well I think, it is that piece about finding out, finding out what your colleagues might be going through, what your your wives, your sisters, your daughters, etc, might be going through? It is about educating yourself, and time to understand, and actually trying to have the conversation no matter how uncomfortable it might feel.

It's that thing, isn't it? It's always worth thinking about it, then when it's actually happening, so once you're having the conversation, actually, as you said earlier, you'll certainly learn a lot, and actually, you never know when that can come in useful really. So I think it is about being comfortable when you hear these conversations, not running away from them, but being you know, opening your mind to see and learn about what what's happening, and being comfortable with talking about it if and when it comes up, which I know is not easy, and it's easy to say. But actually, it's one of those things give a little and you get a lot back.

**Sharon** I think curiosity is a great thing, isn't it? I’ll call it mindful curiosity..

You know, so a bit of respect in there as well. Don't just adult into a conversation, you know. But yeah, be curious, ask those questions in the right way. I think there's a key thing here about being supportive. And around all things inclusion, treat everybody as an individual, you know, so we've talked about some symptoms today, we've talked about some possible interventions, they won't suit everybody. So don't assume you're the expert, because, you know, you've dropped one bit of advice, and that helps an individual doesn't mean you're an expert in this, but get to know people on the individual basis. Listen to what they're saying. And, you know, sort of adapt to that and be the support that they need you to be.

**Elaine** And don’t be too judgmental.

**Steven** Staff networks have cropped up a couple of times as well throughout today, but what sort of support can they offer? How can they raise awareness of menopause? How can they start to role model staff experiences.

**Sharon** I think awareness days, you know, Awareness Months, there are great springboards for these types of conversations. Even things that like International Women's Day, for example, coming up, 8th March, use that as a springboard as well. So where there's those opportunities to do it, do it, share stories on your internal communications, advocate the training, advocate the awareness raising, and be there for people, have your arms open, have them ready for ways you know, if people need to access you to get that support, whether that's an individual who's perimenopausal or menopausal or a manager who thinks they've got a colleague who weighs and wants some help in terms of approach in that conversation. So it's a kind of be open to the different levels of support the organisation might need.

**Elaine** Think about staff networks, it's almost strength in numbers, isn't it? It's that feeling that it's not just you, you can talk to other people that are going through similar things, you can share some of the things that have helped them. as Sharon said before, they don't always help. But actually, sometimes people can give you a hint or a tip about something that can make a big difference, and actually, I've seen sort of WhatsApp groups were really successful in these sorts of spaces, that actually, on a day, when somebody's not feeling so good, they can go on to the WhatsApp group and get loads of support from colleagues who have been there, you know, and, and will come up with advice and help and support. And also going back to what Sharon was saying there in terms of how you celebrate it across the organisation, doing it collectively, is really helpful than sort of one person just trying to do it on their own, you know, you've got a number of friends, but also where you've got organisations that are perhaps geographically spread, or, you know, the people working in, in very different types of work, actually having sort of colleagues in each area that can understand the specifics of what's going on in each area, or what's specific to each job role, then that sort of thing is really helpful, because there's always somewhere, someone that's been there, done it, worn the t-shirt, before, so let's use them in organisations to increase the learning, and support that we

can give people.

**Elaine** And I think in this topic, area, invite everybody into that staff group. So men, women, younger women, not just women who are experiencing it, you know, bring everybody in into the conversation, because I think that's where you get that true kind of culture shift and making it that this is the ‘norm’ round here. This is how we have these conversations.

**Steven** We've got the beauty as well, as you mentioned, Sharon, actually, this doesn't comfortably fit into one protected characteristic. So your age network could be focusing on this. Your gender based networks could be focusing on this as well as your mental health and well being but also race and ethnicity. What do different cultures think about menopause? If we think about it from an orientation perspective too, of course, people have different orientations, they gotta go through where to pause tape, so can we bring that into their conversations, get them to, again, be in it all together, to have that conversation rather than it just being one individual standing alone.

**Elaine** And that goes back to that point where we started from, this is natural. It affects lots of people, most women, some men, it's a very natural process that people are going to go through, and that's why it doesn't fit into an icebox.

**Steven** I just want to say my thank you’s. Thank you, Elaine. Good to have you here today.

**Elaine** It's great to have conversations about menopause. And as I said before, thinking back a few years ago, we couldn't be having this conversation, because society wasn't ready for it. It is now and that's great.

**Steven** And thank you, Sharon.

**Sharon** Thanks, Steven.

**Steven** For more information about how to support colleagues going through the menopause, visit our website that's www.inclusive employers.co.uk, or members can speak to their account managers.

On the next podcast, we are going to be talking about faith. Together with our guests, we will be delving into what to do what not to do to make inclusion an everyday reality for people of faith.

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