



Women’s Health in the Workplace – what’s next on the agenda?

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Woman’s History Month, and International Women’s Day celebrations, are coming to a close. Let’s look at why there is still a need for employers to keep women’s health in the workplace on the agenda.

Earlier this month, we held a [webinar](#) with [Wellbeing of Women](#) (leading UK women’s health charity and innovator behind the [Menopause Workplace Pledge](#)) to discuss the importance of supporting women’s health in the workplace.

Why does this matter?

It impacts on employee health and well-being, which feeds into productivity and your business culture. It impacts on the ability to

retain key talent, the domino effect of which can be decreased diversity (a particular issue for FCA regulated firms given the regulators [increasing attention in this area](#)) and unbalanced gender pay gap statistics. In a world where there are global talent shortages, savvy employers are educating themselves on what can be done to manage these risks (which often involves relatively small and inexpensive measures).

So, what are these employers thinking about?

Pregnancy Loss

Statistics are unclear as this is an often unreported area, though it's estimated that ¼ of pregnancies end in miscarriage. Governments globally are recognising the impact this has on employees, with New Zealand, UK and Australia introducing forms of paid miscarriage leave. Employers who want to get ahead of the curve are voluntarily offering the same or referring to pregnancy loss in absence / compassionate leave policies. Clients have found that, in practice, this does not create a significant shift in absence levels though has its positive effects on employee morale.

Fertility Benefits

Once a more US-centric benefit, these are making their way across the pond. Leading UK employers are introducing paid time off to support with fertility treatments and, in some cases, reimbursement for the costs of treatment. Neither of these are a legal requirement, though they are starting to form part of a parcel of employee benefits designed to retain top talent (particularly where there is a postcode lottery across Europe on the extent to which certain fertility treatments are available). There's a lot to consider when mapping out these benefits. Employers should be mindful that limiting their access to specific genders may create discrimination risks and that there can be a fine line between offering a benefit and being perceived to give recommendations on how to manage a medical scenario (one to watch if engaging with external providers/clinics who may want to pitch their services to your workforce).

The Menopause

Alarming statistics have drawn attention to impact of the menopause on employees, businesses and the global economy. It's tricky to quantify the cost of this, as many do not come forward to discuss their symptoms. Estimates suggest that in the UK 14 million working days per year are "lost" due to menopausal symptoms (which feeds into why the [UK government are consulting on](#) legal change in this area and potentially treating the menopause as a specific characteristic to be protected from discrimination). "Lost" can mean that employees are making up for this working time in their free time, which can exacerbate symptoms leading to a vicious circle that results in employees leaving the workplace. Employers are engaging with employees, specialist training consultants and healthcare providers to put menopause policies and broader support measures in place – see our tips [here](#).

What's next?

To describe the menopause as the "last great taboo" demonstrates a blind spot. As the menopause awareness campaigns have shown us, there is limited education and awareness of women's health issues amongst the general public and a lot more to discover. This month is also [Endometriosis Action Month](#) which raises awareness about a condition affecting approx. 10% of women with, in many cases, similar symptoms to the menopause. Other employers are focusing on period dignity in the workplace to create a culture of openness and support for those who menstruate. This can include supplying menstrual products in workplace bathrooms – a small, and relatively inexpensive, gesture to make employees more comfortable and avoid wasted time in last minute dashes to a pharmacy! One charity found that 68% of menstruators surveyed had left work immediately if they got their period and did not have the right product at hand.

This growing awareness can, in a sense, be daunting for HR teams who already have a lot to juggle. It's worth remembering that employers are not expected to be medical experts and there are various incredible charities, such as [Wellbeing of Women](#), that offer free guidance and support for employers on women's health matters.