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Embracing menopause

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Menopause has been historical for ages but it still continues to throw physicians and patients by surprise. Average age of menopause continues at an average age of 51 years.

However, as life expectancy has increased larger population of women continues to spend more life time in peri to postmenopausal phase. As women comprise a large part of workforce across the world, it is important to address this topic to improve their quality of life . This will have far reaching results on global health of women.

Menopause is a retrospective and only a clinical diagnosis. It is defined as cessation of menses more than 12 calendar months ago. It is a physiological process which all women experience. It may last longer than most women realise. Perimenopause is a period extending from 45 to 55 years of age. During this phase women may experience abnormal uterine bleeding and or vasomotor symptoms to mention a few. Early Menopause is defined as cessation of periods for more than 12 calendar months in a woman under the age of 45 years. However, same clinical scenario in a patient under the age of 40 years is defined as premature Ovarian insufficiency.

Menopausal women may have any or all organ systems in

their body affected. Some of the clinical features encountered are- vasomotor symptoms of night sweats and hot flashes, headaches, vaginal dryness, loss of libido and psychological issues.

Diagnosis of menopause is clinical. Some blood tests like Follicular stimulating Hormone(FSH) and estradiol levels are only helpful in supporting the diagnosis and are snapshot only. These tests are not designed to diagnose or predict menopause.

Treatment of menopausal symptoms is individualised on case by case basis. One size does not fit all. Treatment options include: Life style changes-(diet, exercise supplements like calcium and vitamin d), non-hormonal treatments(SSRI and SNRI) , hormone Replacement Therapy and over the counter preparations (red clover, Gingko biloba etc)

However, it is the holistic approach that is required in treating patients who are undergoing menopausal symptoms.

It is time for all the Gynaecologists to come together and think about changing the perception for women about this “ time of change “ in their lives. The most important step in achieving this is by encouraging and empowering the patients to come forward and talk about it.

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