

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

4th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 6
March 2024

PE2012: Remove need for follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) blood tests before prescribing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Petitioner Angela Hamilton

**Petition
summary** Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to remove the need for follicle-stimulating hormone blood tests in women aged 40-45, who are experiencing menopause symptoms, before Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can be prescribed to relieve their symptoms and replenish hormone levels.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2012>

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [31 May 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and NHS Education for Scotland.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, NHS Education for Scotland and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.

6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition, provided by the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 108 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

PE2012: Remove need for follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) blood tests before prescribing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Petitioner

Angela Hamilton

Date lodged

03 April 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to remove the need for follicle-stimulating hormone blood tests in women aged 40-45, who are experiencing menopause symptoms, before Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) can be prescribed to relieve their symptoms and replenish hormone levels.

Previous action

I have discussed this issue with doctors, and with Jamie Hepburn MSP. I have also done research based on the menopause groups I am part of, and I'm now a voice for these women. I am now taking this issue to a national level.

Background information

As a 42year-old perimenopausal woman, I joined online support groups, read about menopause and noticed a recurring theme. Many women aged 40-45 have been told they have all the symptoms of perimenopause, but as blood tests do not back this up, they are dismissed by doctors and left to suffer debilitating symptoms.

FSH tests are based on hormone levels at a precise moment, and do not give a clear indication of the fluctuating levels that occur during perimenopause. Why is this unreliable FSH test still being used, wasting valuable NHS funds?

The symptoms lead women to leave jobs and education, and miss out on precious time with family and friends. Their lives are taken over by what is a natural transition but one which is debilitating. Failed by doctors over and over again, some women take their lives because they cannot cope with the symptoms. GPs are not adequately trained to deal with menopause.

Change needs to happen to help more women lead a normal life.

Annexe B

Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2012 on 31 May 2023

The Convener: The first new petition, PE2012, which was lodged by Angela Hamilton, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to remove the need for follicle-stimulating hormone blood tests in women aged 40 to 45 who are experiencing menopause symptoms before hormone replacement therapy can be prescribed to relieve their symptoms and replenish hormone levels. Angela tells us that she is aware of many women aged 40 to 45 who have all the symptoms of perimenopause, but, because their blood tests do not confirm that, they are dismissed by doctors and left to endure debilitating symptoms that affect all aspects of their lives.

In responding to the petition, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health highlights National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance that HRT can be offered without the need for a blood test when other symptoms are present but that a blood test may be required to rule out other illnesses. The minister also mentions that NHS Education for Scotland has been commissioned to create a bespoke training package focused on menopause, including perimenopause and menstrual health, and that there is now a specialist menopause service in every mainland national health service health board, with a buddy system in place for island health boards.

Angela has provided a submission that shares the experiences of women with perimenopause symptoms who have sought help from their general practitioners and been left feeling dismissed and let down. Colleagues will remember that that is a common theme in petitions. She also raises concerns about NICE guidelines not being consistently followed by local health boards and a specific concern about the prescription of antidepressants for women with menopause symptoms.

This is a different area of women's healthcare. Unfortunately, there are similarities in the patient experience. There is an appeal to the committee to see what more we might be able to do about that. I suggest that we keep the petition open in the first instance and write to the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to seek its view on the action called for. Are there any other suggestions?

Alexander Stewart: As you identify, convener, this would appear to be a major problem, and women are being let down. Over the past seven years, and even prior to that, I have had many letters in my mailbag on the issue, and it is fairly moving up the women's health agenda.

In addition to your suggestions, I suggest that we write to NHS Education for Scotland to seek information on the development of the bespoke training that was mentioned, the framework focused on menopause and how the training is being rolled out to GPs and primary healthcare providers. It seems that the biggest problem that we have is that there is no consistency. Seemingly, women are being

dismissed and having to endure and suffer for a number of years. Doing both those things will give us an opportunity to see where we are.

Foyso! Choudhury: I agree with Mr Stewart. The training programme is not mandatory, but it should be—the issue affects half of our population.

The Convener: Are we content to proceed with the suggestions that have been made?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Annexe C

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) submission of 3 July 2023

PE2012/C: Remove need for follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) blood tests before prescribing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Thank you for your letter of 2 June, asking for the RCOG's view on the issues raised in 'PE2012: Remove need for follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) blood tests before prescribing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)'.

The RCOG has sought expert advice on this matter from the British Menopause Society (BMS), which is a specialist society of the College. The BMS has advised that, in accordance with NICE guidelines, FSH blood tests should be *considered* for women aged 40 to 45, but should not be required. The tests are not recommended to diagnose perimenopause or menopause in women aged 45 or over. Perimenopause and menopause can be diagnosed and treated in these women without a blood test, with HRT as a treatment option.

Should you require any further information on this, do please contact the BMS.

I hope this is helpful.

NHS Education for Scotland submission of 3 July 2023

PE2012/D: Remove need for follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) blood tests before prescribing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

NHS Education for Scotland would like to offer the following supporting letter in response to your request.

NHS Education for Scotland

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) is the national health board with statutory functions for providing, co-ordinating, developing, funding and advising on education, training and workforce planning for the NHS and in partnership with SSSC for social care staff. It is a national organisation with a significant regional presence in Scotland.

NES is a leader in educational design, delivery and quality assurance. Utilising the very best in technology enabled learning, organisational and leadership development, workforce and learning analytics and digital development, across the entire health and social care workforce and in every community in Scotland, NES will help to facilitate staff to be supported, skilled, capable, digitally enabled and motivated to deliver improved outcomes.

NES leads national programmes such as the NHS Scotland Academy and NHS Scotland Youth Academy (with NHS Golden Jubilee), the planned National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Social Care, and the Centre for Workforce Supply. NES also leads national level quality improvement development programmes and is leading on the development of the national digital platform and a wide range of digital technology solutions.

NES have been commissioned to develop an online learning package around Menopause and Menstrual Health. The resource content is currently being researched and written. It is aimed to be available to general practice/primary care practitioners by 31st March 2024. The resource will be accessed via our Turas Learn platform and will be widely publicised to the target audience via our communications strategy. It will be free to access for practitioners working in Scotland. All NHS Education for Scotland resources undergo a regular review period to ensure changes to guidance and current best practice are reflected.

Petitioner submission of 4 October 2023

PE2012/E: Remove need for follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) blood tests before prescribing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

Since my last submission of evidence, I have received the following update from Person A.

Person A (43) – Due to constantly being let down by my GP, I saw no option but to approach a private clinic. I knew this would cost a substantial amount, but both my physical and mental health depended on getting the correct treatment. After paying just over £200 for a consultation, I was prescribed HRT based solely on my symptoms. The menopause specialist was disgusted that I had been left so long without it. The prescription cost £118 and my follow up appointment was included in the cost of my initial appointment. The clinic wrote to my surgery with my treatment plan and asked them to take over the care. I made the appointment with my GP, and I was faced with the same issues as before, “I still think you are too young”, “This goes against our guidelines”, “What about the blood test?” “Are you sure it isn’t just anxiety?” “If your blood pressure is high, we can’t give you HRT as it could lead to a stroke”. Their information is outdated as transdermal HRT does not carry an increased risk of stroke, and is safe for those with high blood pressure to take. They gave me one month of HRT and said I can only get it after this if I pass their tests, and they are reluctant to believe what the menopause clinic are saying.

Person A is just one example of what women are up against when attending their doctor for menopause treatment and support. Outdated information, following local instead of national guidance, reliance on an unreliable blood test, age discrimination, and sheer ignorance are stopping women from getting the help that they need. Many surgeries do not have anyone who is trained and specialises in menopause. Training is optional when it should be mandatory. Change is needed urgently.

Further information regarding transdermal HRT safety is available from the British Menopause Society in this guide: <https://thebms.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/HRT-Guide-160516.pdf>

Thank you for considering the petition and the evidence provided.