



# Time for change in AXA

The menopause is an increasingly relevant issue in the UK workforce as the proportion of older women in the work place rises. Nationally 70% of women of menopausal age work. However, few employers recognise the menopause as a significant health and safety issue for women despite the fact that it can seriously disrupt the working lives of many female employees.



The menopause is a natural process which occurs in many women in their late 40s and early 50s (although it can occur earlier or later).

The working environment can worsen menopausal symptoms and there is a lot employers could do to make this transition for women easier. Despite this a **TUC** report into the subject found only 1 in 5 employers offer advice to its staff and many employees suffered harassment and humiliation in the workplace because of the menopause

With **AXA** employing 2270 women over 45 out a workforce of just over 10,000 UK employees, **Unite** has proposed a model "Menopause Agreement" to the company, which it can incorporate into its policies to help female staff going through the menopause.

## Workplace symptoms...

The TUC report listed the following symptoms as most likely to be made worse by work during the menopause:

- hot flushes
- headaches
- tiredness
- lack of energy
- sweating
- anxiety attacks
- short-term memory loss
- dry skin and eyes
- aches and pains
- irritability

Health and safety issues for menopausal women include:

- toilet access and breaks
- unsuitable office clothing
- workstation design
- workplace temperature
- inflexible hours and breaks
- poor indoor air quality
- access to sanitary facilities
- prolonged standing
- workplace stress

Women also suffer from negative attitudes adding to stress at work including criticism from management about menopause related sick leave and subsequent disciplinary action, embarrassment in discussing issues with managers and even criticism ridicule or harassment when the raise the subject.

The "model agreement" we have proposed will demonstrate **AXA** is a 'preferred employer' and promote the equalities agenda, ensure women are no discriminated against, provide support for employees, demonstrate **AXA** realises that the menopause is not an illness and ensure **AXA** complies with its health and safety obligations.

Whilst the subject of the menopause is not one everybody feels comfortable discussing publicly, it is one that has serious effects on the working lives of a lot of our members and consequently it is a subject **Unite** believes needs to be addressed by employers such as **AXA** who employ a majority of women in its workforce.