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## Does style matter? Assessing the impact of two magazines about the menopause

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### Focal points

- There is uncertainty among women about the impact of the menopause and the place of hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- Providing information about the menopause and HRT which meets women's needs is a priority; two styles of magazine on this topic were developed and distributed to women attending general practices
- Women preferred the 'medical' rather than 'woman's journal' style of magazine for information on the menopause; however, both formats answered most or all of the questions women had about this subject
- Two-thirds of the women in the study would like more information about alternatives to HRT
- Women cited most frequently magazines and newspapers as sources where they had previously obtained information on the menopause; this supports the use of the magazine format to provide information in this area

### Introduction

Most women resist medicalisation of the menopause. In deciding whether to use hormone replacement therapy (HRT), they may have feelings of fear and uncertainty and tend to increase their control by finding appropriate information.<sup>1</sup> An educational approach tends to assume that with adequate information more women will take and adhere to HRT. However, women's own views and opinions about medication, health and menopause have been relatively neglected.<sup>2</sup> Three main themes identified in women's accounts of decisions were the presence or absence of troublesome symptoms, doctors' views and advice, and views towards menopause and medication. It is therefore important to provide information for women not just about HRT, but also about a variety of issues around the menopause, and to consider how information is presented. Our objectives were to assess different formats of written information and to assess the impact of providing written information about the menopause.

### Method

A pack containing two different styles of magazine was offered to all women aged 45–55 years, who attended three Leeds general practice surgeries. One magazine, *Living with the Menopause*, was written in a medical style and included an explanation of the menopause, likely symptoms, changing emotions, sexuality, and information on HRT. The other magazine, *Living Well*, was in the style of a woman's journal, and included general health notes relating to the menopause, a dear doctor section, articles on fashion, body care and a section which related real life experiences. Publicity posters were placed in the surgeries and receptionists distributed the packs. The pack included a questionnaire, a consent form, a return envelope and information about the study.

### Results

Four hundred and one packs were distributed in total and questionnaires returned by 151 (38 per cent) women. They were asked their preference for a particular magazine. Sixty-seven (44 per cent) preferred the medical style magazine, and only 16 (11 per cent) opted for the woman's journal

style. Sixty-three (42 per cent) liked them equally and 5 (3 per cent) stated no preference. Age band (<50 and 50+) had no effect on preference.

On a Likert scale (1, "no new information" to 6, "all new information"), four (3 per cent) said that all the information was new, whereas 26 (17 per cent) said that no new information was given (median 3). Younger women and those currently not taking HRT were more likely to see the information as new ( $P=0.082$  and  $P=0.01$  respectively). When women were divided into two groups of ever having used HRT or not, the groups did not differ in the extent to which the pack information was new to them ( $P=0.053$ ). Women cited a variety of sources where they had previously obtained information on the menopause. The most frequently cited, was magazines and newspapers (94; 62 per cent), followed by their GP (69; 46 per cent) and friends (66; 44 per cent).

On a Likert scale of: 1 "answered none of my questions" to 6, "answered all of my questions", the median rating was 5. Age or whether or not they had ever taken HRT did not affect women's responses. One hundred (66 per cent) would have liked more information on alternatives to HRT, and 85 (56 per cent) wanted more information on osteoporosis.

### Discussion

Both styles of magazine had a significant impact, and women preferred the medical style. These results should be interpreted in the light of the small sample size and return rate of less than 50 per cent. Many women gained new information about the menopause, regardless of whether they had ever used HRT. Most women felt that this format of provision of information answered some or all of their questions and requests for information about alternatives to HRT echoes identified resistance to the medicalisation of the menopause.<sup>1</sup> Magazines are a popular source of information and can be used as a useful addition to verbal advice.

### References

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