

ALN EDI Innovation Fund: Menopause Meetups Project

April 2024 and December 2024

Lesley Macnamara

Customer Experience Advisor (Collections)

Katie Swalwell

Customer Experience Advisor (Collections)



ALN Innovation Fund: Menopause Meetups Project

Overview:

The Menopause Subgroup was founded in July 2022 as an offshoot from the main University of Hull library EDI team. The aim of our subgroup was to open communication, provide help and assistance, and facilitate change in making the Brynmor Jones Library a menopause friendly space for our staff. Around 75–80% of people of menopausal age are in work, meaning a large number will transition through the menopause and experience symptoms during their employment¹. Six out of every 10 people experiencing menopausal symptoms say it has a negative impact on their work². Recognising this, we wanted to form a group that works towards supporting any and every library staff member who may be impacted by the menopause, perimenopause, or post menopause.

We offer this support in a range of different ways, including, but not limited to, operating a Teams Channel to share information and advice, offering a Menopause Buddy scheme, looking at and procuring equipment that might help alleviate symptoms, working to normalise conversations about the menopause, looking at working practices, and running Menopause Meetups. It is these Menopause Meetups we focused on supporting and expanding with the ALN Innovation Fund grant. We partnered with Lancaster University and decided to split the grant in half, to allow each library to run internal events; throughout our project timeframe, we had monthly meetings with our partner library and our ALN coordinator, with additional meetings hosted ad-hoc as required.

Project Details:

Since the conception of our subgroup, one of the keystones of our plan has been to host and run regular Menopause Cafés; we have been able to run and host four rounds of cafes to date, totalling six meetings. Four of these meetings were held prior to receiving the ALN grant, and our latest two meetings were grant funded. We gathered feedback after hosting each meetup, and have been constantly working to adapt and improve our meetup format, to ensure it is meeting the needs of the guests attending.

Our current meetup format involves splitting our meeting into two parts; the first part of our meeting focuses on a short activity or event that aims to assist, educate, and facilitate conversations. We follow this event with a Menopause Café: the term Menopause Café is trademarked, but is open to use for events that are “a discussion with no pre-set agenda, where the topics are chosen by the participants on the day. So, an information event, a guest speaker, promoting a particular treatment or product is not a Menopause Café”³. Taking this on board, we aim to ensure the divide in our meetings is clear; we begin with an educational or informational event, and follow with a traditional Menopause Café. This split also allows our guests to choose to attend the meetup as a whole, or focus on the activity or café, if they prefer to engage with just one aspect of the meetup.

Following each meetup, we disseminate a JISC survey, to gather feedback that would allow us to tailor and adapt our meetings moving forward, building on what worked well, and tweaking the aspects that were less well received. In order to ensure frontline staff, who may not have access to a computer, are able to complete this survey, we now provide QR codes to allow easy access via smartphones. We note and reflect on this feedback, our experiences as coordinators, along with a brief outline of the meetups hosted and their costings in this report in the hope that it may benefit the wider ALN network.

Meetup Outlines:

Menopause Boardgames – Date Held: 30/08/24

This meeting involved us looking at a sample of the educational menopause boardgames now being offered. We were grateful to receive one game gratis from INTIMINA/COW⁴, and purchased a second game from Focus Games⁵. We aimed to trial two games to allow multiple games to be played concurrently, ensuring more hands-on opportunities for guests. We also felt trialling two different products would encourage dialogue and analysis during the meetup, fostering conversation and giving us a starting point for discussions.

Response and Feedback:

We had six attendees for this meetup, including hosts. Prior to our meetup beginning, we set up the room and laid out our refreshments and the two games. Focus Games' 'Menopause Game' is designed for 4 to 16 players, and works by dividing players into 2 to 4 teams. A typical game is estimated to last 30 to 60 minutes, we found our game lasted closer to the full hour. INTIMINA's 'Menopause: The Board Game' is for 2 to 4 players and is designed to be played as individuals. Both games are played by rolling the dice, and correctly answering a question. Both games come with a gameboard, dice, player counters, and decks of question cards. INTIMINA's game utilises wildcards scattered through the deck, which move the player's counter forward or back on the board, to instigate an element of chance to the gameplay. Focus Games use two decks of cards, the question cards, and 'Special Cards' which contain a statement designed to be read aloud and discussed as a group; a timer is included to monitor discussion length.

We offered our attendees the option to play as individuals or in teams and found the preference was to focus on one game and play in teams; we chose to play Focus Game's 'Menopause Game' as it was designed to be played in teams. Working in teams proved to be a successful move, the groups allowed people to join and dip out of the meetup as required, as well as allowing attendees who were more reserved to take a step back and observe if they preferred.

The Menopause Game proved to be very successful at sparking conversation and discussion, as well as providing some informative statistics. We did not vet the games questions before playing; this is something we may learn from and will need to discuss prior to adding to the catalogue. For example, one true or false question was "Every woman goes through the menopause." with the answer being "It is true. Every woman goes through the menopause. But at different times and in different ways"⁶; this statement can be challenged on numerous fronts, as women may pass away before the menopause, nor does it take into account trans women who may experience menopause symptoms if their hormone therapy is interrupted or unstable⁷, but outside of changes to their therapy, will not experience menopause itself. Although the question did prompt discussion, we were concerned that the exclusionary answer had potential to cause offence or distress.

Playing the game filled our scheduled meetup hour; midway through the meetup we offered attendees the opportunity to move away from the boardgame towards a Menopause Café; guests indicated that they would like to complete the game. Feedback received via the survey following the meetup showed us that playing the game, the openness of the conversation and exchange of information were felt to be highlights of the event. We did receive feedback that hosting the meetups at alternative times may increase engagement. Prior to this meeting we aimed to host two meetups in a week to catch as many potential attendees as possible, however we found we struggled to balance our standard workload alongside hosting multiple events. If the availability of the hosts allows, we hope to revisit hosting multiple meetups featuring the same activity to encourage wider engagement in the future.

Going forward, we will check and document the contents of both games and add them to the library catalogue so they can be checked out and used in meetups hosted by other departments, or as teaching resources for both staff and students. This will allow for their ongoing use as educational tools and discussion prompts. Once catalogued, we will also look to add the games to our Menopause Spotlight reading list to encourage use.



The photo above shows the setup for the boardgame meetup



INTIMINA's 'Menopause: The Board Game' (left) and Focus Games' 'Menopause Game' (right)

Menowashing – Date Held: 28/11/24

For this meetup, we focused on “menowashing”, a phenomenon that sees the menopause used as a “marketing opportunity for companies that are packaging and marking up products with little or no clinically verified evidence of their effectiveness. This heavy marketing can be seen as taking advantage of women”⁸. In order to make the event more tactile and engaging, we purchased samples of the more affordable versions of these products to look into, test, and discuss during the meetup. By looking into the claims made by the products, investigating the alleged active ingredients, and reading a sample of the news and discourse surrounding menowashing, we hoped to open a conversation and encourage critical thinking around this marketing tactic.

Response and Feedback:

We had five attendees to this meetup. For this meetup we adhered to our proposed meeting structure and held a more informative discussion for the first half of the session, before progressing

to a less formal Menopause Café style chat during the latter half of the session. To introduce and outline the concept of menowashing to our attendees who may not have come across the term before, we chose to begin the session with a short clip from a BBC Panorama episode first aired 30th September 2024⁹. The use of this clip received praise in our follow up survey, with an attendee noting it was ‘particularly useful’, and feeding back their appreciation at the way the clip explained menowashing and laid out concerns around the lack of reliable scientific evidence attached to these products.

During the session, attendees appreciated the range of products available, and fed back that they enjoyed trialling and examining the packaging of the product sampled. Several attendees took photos of products, the packaging, and the ‘menopause friendly’ symbols for future reference. Attendees were also able to see the varied assertions on the products about their benefits and efficacy, that they were presented as helping or alleviating menopausal symptoms, and we discussed our opinions on the validity of these claims. As we had several samples of teas and drinks, we purchased little pots and bags to allow attendees to take home samples of the products to trial at their own pace. Although our aim of the meetup was to encourage critical thinking around menowashed products, we ended up finding a few of the selected products were very well received by attendees, to the extent that attendees were considering purchasing the products for themselves.

As we had physical products to share and discuss, we were able to create and share samples to staff members who had been unable to attend the event, but were interested in menowashing. We also kept the products out on display in our office, allowing visitors to see and trial them. The menowashing items allowed us to continue the discussion and reach more members of staff in a more casual way in the weeks following the meetup.

We found that attendance at our meetups has struggled during recent events, despite our information sharing, encouragement to attend and reminders ahead of the event. This was noted in our feedback. In order to expand our reach going forward, we will need to investigate ways of hosting events or reaching staff who are unable to make meetups due to service point coverage requirements or shift variations. Additionally, although splitting the meeting into an activity and a café allowed us to offer variation, feedback did indicate that this structure might not work as well

for attendees who could only attend a portion of the meeting due to other commitments, and so may miss out on the activity or café unintentionally.



The photo above depicts the products chosen to discuss menowashing

World Menopause Awareness Month Posts – Posted Between: 30/09/24 – 21/10/24

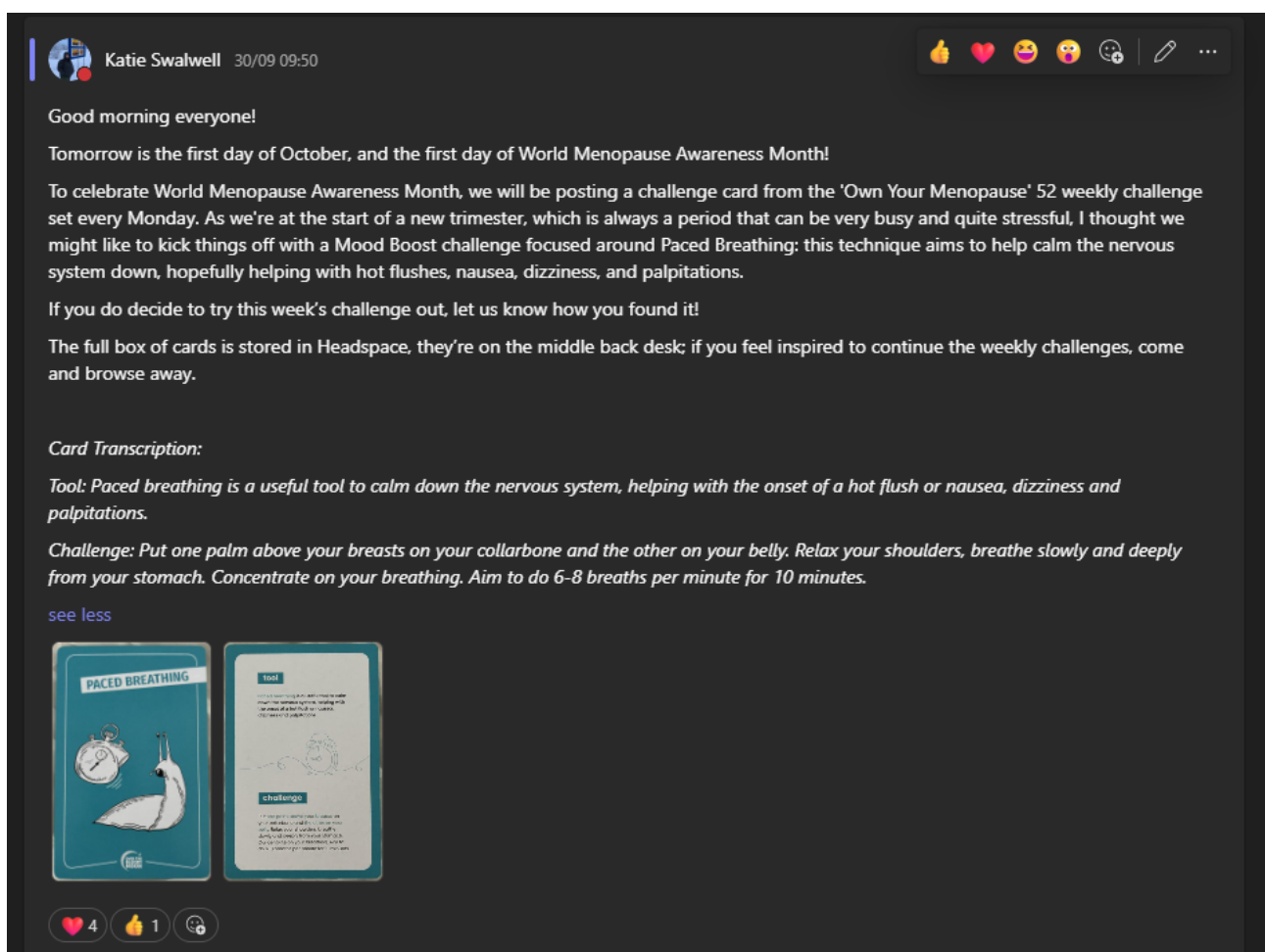
Alongside the Menopause Meetups we run a dedicated Menopause Teams channel which we use to share articles and information, as well as disseminate times and dates of our meetups and other potentially relevant menopause events. To encourage discussion and foster engagement over World Menopause Awareness Month, we purchased a set of menopause self-care cards and used them as a prompt to share tips and advice over the Teams channel for World Menopause Awareness Month. We selected and posted five of the cards, one each week in October.

Response and Feedback:

The 'Own Your Menopause' cards purchased contained a set of 52 cards divided into five themes: Mood Boost, Brain Boost, Mojo Boost, Body Boost, and Sleep Boost. We chose to showcase one card from each theme across the five-week period. The cards offered a good variety of weekly challenges ranging from encouraging users to locate local or online menopause support networks, to recipe suggestions, offering a good variation of challenges. In order to suit the playing card format, the cards often make statements or give advice without citing any scientific sources, at most they will offer a slightly nebulous "Many studies have found"; although this helps ensure the

cards are concise and not overwhelmed with information, it may be less helpful to a user who wishes to access more concrete research.

We cross-posted the cards to the EDI Channel to raise awareness for World Menopause Awareness Month, but made the decision not to cross post wider to minimise digital notification overload across the library Teams channels. The cards garnered engagement in the form of 'likes', but despite encouragement within the posts, people did not share feedback on if or how they found attempting the weekly challenges. We did note that whilst posting the cards, several other posts regarding menopause related events and support networks were made to the Menopause Café Teams Channel, which was engagement that had not previously been seen over the past few months, as the channel had been quite quiet. This seems to indicate that the awareness event did help encourage engagement with the channel, and helped ensure the Menopause Café channel did not get lost amongst the other Teams channels used within the library.



The screenshot above shows the card chosen for the first World Menopause Awareness Month post

We decided to look at adding the cards to the library catalogue in order to make them available to both individuals who are interested in the weekly challenges, and to other menopause groups, both staff led and student led, who may find benefit in using them as discussion prompts.

Next steps:

Going forward, we aim to continue hosting Menopause Meetups but intend to investigate ways of varying our structure and our meeting styles, to best reach and support a wider range of staff. Examples of these are that we will investigate how we can hold virtual meetups, or longer held activities held in the staff room area to allow for more visibility and ad hoc engagement, or offer polls before meetings to see when the best time for potential attendees would be. We are also aiming to be able to plan dates further ahead so that we can advertise for longer, minimising the potential for crossover of meetings and allow staff to plan ahead more if they wish to attend, with the aim of this enabling wider attendance. One of the ongoing challenges will be attendance numbers, as we are in a customer-facing building; however, we have found that smaller numbers of attendees have encouraged sharing and engagement within the events.

Following the completion of our final meetup, we met with a representative of the wider university EDI team to discuss working with the universities Women's Empowerment Network to see what can be drawn from our project to expand menopause support across campus.

The funding provided by the EDI Innovation Fund helped us improve our Menopause Meetups by offering resources and physical examples of the issues discussed, allowing for more varied and engaging meetings to be hosted. If future funding is able to be secured, we would like to investigate the possibility of hosting an event using the MenoVest™, the "world's only menopause simulator, allowing people to experience disruptive physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms, associated with menopause."¹⁰ For cost neutral meetups, we intend to look into activities around HRT; during our later cafes we have found HRT to be a popular topic of conversation, and have received feedback from attendees that they would like further discussion on the topic.

We also intend to re-visit sessions with the resources we purchased from this funding as our attendees vary from session to session and there are enough questions for people to play more than once without repetition.

Endnotes

-
- ¹ <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/news/menopause-breaking-taboo#:~:text=Around%2075%E2%80%93%25%20of%20women,experience%20symptoms%20while%20at%20work.> (Accessed 15/02/23)
- ² <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/supporting-our-nhs-people-through-menopause-guidance-for-line-managers-and-colleagues/> (Accessed 15/02/23)
- ³ <https://www.menopausecafe.net/hold-a-menopause-cafe/> (Accessed 15/02/23)
- ⁴ <https://www.intimina.com/blog/board-game-that-is-all-about-the-menopause/> (Accessed 21/05/23)
- ⁵ <https://shop.focusgames.com/products/menopause-game?variant=40018406015046> (Accessed 15/02/23)
- ⁶ Menopause Game card, Focus Games in partnership with Snowdrop Argyll
- ⁷ <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/human-resources/equality/menopause/who-can-experience-the-menopause> (Accessed 28/11/24)
- ⁸ <https://inews.co.uk/news/menopause-supplement-brands-exploiting-2796433#:~:text=Doctors%20have%20accused%20brands%20of,raise%20prices%20on%20certain%20products.> (Accessed 21/05/23)
- ⁹ <https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/clip/261045> (Accessed 20/11/24)
- ¹⁰ <https://www.overthebloodymoon.com/menovest> (accessed 03/12/24)

Contact Us

If you have any questions, comments, or would like any further information regarding Menopause Meetups or this report, please do not hesitate to reach out to us, we are more than happy to help in any way we can. Our contact details are:

Lesley Macnamara - L.Macnamara@hull.ac.uk

Katie Swalwell – K.Swalwell@hull.ac.uk

Library EDI Mailbox - library-EDI@hull.ac.uk