

How a diagnosis saved *our marriage*

A husband, who we quite understand would prefer to remain anonymous, so let's call him Joe, recounts how watching Kirsty Wark's documentary *The Menopause and Me*, not only helped his wife but also, he believes, may have saved their marriage.



Joe writes... *"I don't believe in HRT..... a short statement with huge consequences. These were the words that were left ringing in my ears after my wife's consultation with her female GP. I emphasise female so you know it wasn't a statement from some ill-informed male doctor.*

What was about to occur over the next five years was very difficult, resulting in my wife having to, over various time periods, take an Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor (SSRI), which is mainly used to treat depression. So, depending on what type she was given, determined how every aspect of our lives would be lived. This would be everything from day to day life (and I use that term loosely because it was as far from living day to day as you could get) to social events that became so difficult as I would not know from one minute to the next how she would respond or behave in certain situations.

Difficult times

Examples of her changed behaviour, which were completely out of character, would be anything from something as trivial as just butting into your conversation and taking it over to being overtly hostile. Afterwards she would try and explain saying: *"I am really sorry, I knew I was saying it but just couldn't stop it coming out."*

There were times when she would come out with something to the point where people would look at us

as if to say *'Did she just do/really say that.'* Then I would have to try and placate people to try and take the heat out of the situation. I eventually gave up trying to explain to folk that *"this is not normally her"* or *"she is dealing with a lot at the moment"*. In fact, I just stopped socialising or would go to an event and then find a reason to leave, usually on my own.

At home I would just have to walk on eggshells and try not to do or say anything that would kick something off. As the years progressed there was never a single day without acrimony between us and that eventually worsened until it got to the point where not a single hour would pass without some kind of drama.

"At home I would just have to walk on eggshells and try not to do or say anything that would kick something off."

Inevitably, this started to take its toll on my own health and I was diagnosed as hypertensive. I have subsequently been put on an ACE (angiotensin-converting enzyme) inhibitor to reduce my blood pressure and will now have to spend the rest of my life on it. Meanwhile I tried, as best as I could, to protect my family from the worst of it and I tried everything to

• It is a tragedy that relationships can potentially break down over something that is so treatable.



convince my wife that this could not go on as it was having such an impact on her health, her family and our way of life and of course, our marriage.

She knew herself that our family was very close to being just blown apart but such was her state of mind it was always 'everybody else' who had the problem and in her own words again, "I am fine its you that needs to see the doctor."

What happened next

I finally felt I had exhausted all the channels that I could go down to try to at least hold the family together. Then finally, just as I was ready to move out, really in an attempt to shock her into addressing the issue, something remarkable happened.

Unbeknown to me she had been watching television and noticed that a documentary on HRT, Kirsty Wark's *The Menopause and Me*, was being shown with Dr Heather Currie being the interviewee. (see the Summer issue of Menopause Matters if you missed it!)

The following morning I was already up and my just wife walked into the kitchen and said something I had been longing to hear but had given up hope that I would .."I know what's wrong with me. It's the menopause" and proceeded to burst into floods of tears. She then asked me what I think she should do and straightaway I said see the GP - just not the one you saw five years ago!

Our life now

Since my wife knew that it was the menopause behind her change and out of character behaviour and feelings, we now laugh and call it the "monsterpause." Suddenly

everything is now in perspective and although she still has moments where the symptoms occur, she has a completely different way of dealing with them and reacting to them.

It is just such a tragedy that families, marriages, relationships are doubtless being broken up because of something that is so treatable. If women were missing any other hormone the NHS would be falling over itself to try and find a way of replacing it. Unfortunately, we have tabloid newspapers with lazy journalists who, when they need to sell papers or when nothing else is happening, roll out the *HRT & Cancer headline*.

My hope is that if even one women who reads this decides to seek the help that is out there or if one family remains together as a result of our experience, then our ordeal will not have been in vain.



My wife suffered the most and to see someone who was once so gregarious and fun suffer like this was not an experience that I would ever wish to repeat.

The help is out there, I plead with you go and get it."

Menopause Matters appreciates the courage of all readers who share their experiences with us but we do not often hear directly from partners who are affected, so thank you Joe and we wish you and your wife every happiness for the future.

