TAKING STOCK

Rammya Mathew: Celebrating the quality and calibre of GPs

Rammya Mathew GP

GPs in the UK are so accustomed to sustained attacks in the media that it’s only ever a matter of time before we’re hit with the next tirade of abuse. It’s often about access, waiting times, or even the fact that many of us are women and work only “part time.” The latest round of bad press ensued, however, after a documentary series on the menopause by the popular TV presenter Davina McCall. The programme reported that “caseloads” of women had suffered at the hands of their GP after being told that they didn’t need hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or that they weren’t menopausal.

This can easily feed into a narrative that the country’s GPs are underskilled and underqualified and that, as a result of our incompetence, women are being badly let down. However, the more nuanced truth is that many U turns have been made regarding the safety of HRT, which have had a lasting impact on practitioners’ confidence in the available evidence. Women’s symptoms can’t always be attributed to the menopause, and although the benefits of HRT outweigh the risks in most women, this is not always the case.

I don’t deny that individual women have been let down, and I applaud Davina for raising awareness of what’s often still considered a taboo subject in society. But the point about GPs’ competence needs to be challenged. GPs in the UK are among the most skilled generalists in the world: we undergo rigorous postgraduate training and assessment, and we see and treat many conditions that would instead be managed by specialists in other healthcare systems. It’s also worth noting that the most recent GP Patient Survey showed that 89% of patients felt listened to, and 93% of patients said that they felt as involved as they wanted to be in decisions about their care. “It would seem that the consultation model suggested a few years ago by David Haslam—"Shut up, listen, care, know something"—is underpinning how we practise and how we care for our patients.

Many things are undeniably wrong with UK general practice at the moment, but the calibre of our GPs, and indeed of the wider general practice team, is one of the few things we can still celebrate. Many of my female patients claim that I’ve given them back their sense of wellbeing after we’ve discussed the menopause and reached a joint decision about HRT. I don’t believe that this is the case only for me, as I’m sure that GPs all over the country are doing exactly the same and receiving similar positive feedback. Sadly, however, good news stories rarely make the press.

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3 Papanikitas A. Shut up and listen! Br J Gen Pract 2022;72:69. https://bjay.org/content/72/715/69