

MENOPAUSE

Statement

HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [8.54 pm]: I am following a middle-aged man talking about wind, so this should actually go quite well. Last Saturday morning I was at Optus Stadium, very early. It was a beautiful place. It was absolutely stunning. Then, just imagine about 150 middle-aged women converging on it, including two women from the chamber: Hon Sandra Carr and me.

Hon Sandra Carr: Who are you calling middle-aged?

Hon LORNA HARPER: You!

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Hang on—divide!

Hon Sandra Carr: Come over to my side!

Hon LORNA HARPER: She is only a couple of years younger.

There were a handful of men there, so I will say that; there were a few men there. We were all there at the lovely Optus Stadium to attend the Women's Life Cycle Summit hosted and put on by Menopause Alliance Australia—I think members could gather that I was going somewhere along those lines. If people do not remember from the last time that I got up to speak about Menopause Alliance Australia, it provides evidence-based information and support for women who are perimenopausal or menopausal, and extends that support to their families, friends and workplace colleagues.

I have stood before and talked about menopause, and I will stand and talk about it again because it is still one of those subjects that appears to be taboo in society. Women today generally live longer than our ancestors did, as do all of us, actually. Previously, people used to die in their early 40s so women did not quite hit the menopausal stage. Now, women spend about one-third of their lives being perimenopausal or menopausal. Gentlemen who are all married are all smiling lovingly, thinking that this is going to be wonderful. It is! It can be wonderful—if they sit quietly and listen. I hope my husband is listening.

It was a really good place to be because women could talk openly about their feelings on menopause. Experts were also there to talk about what was going on. One of the special guests and ambassadors was the wonderful author, traveller, writer and commentator Kathy Lette. People may remember *Puberty Blues*, which I will not reference because that is unparliamentary language. My favourite book back in the day was *Mad Cows*. I was a huge fan of that book. It still makes me laugh to this day. Kathy talked about what it was like being menopausal in her 60s. Menopause does not last a short time; it lasts a long time.

One of the most interesting people to speak was Professor Jayashri Kulkarni. She is a professor of psychiatry at Alfred Health at Monash University and a director of HER Centre Australia. She spoke about the really hard parts that people do not talk about with menopause, and one was how many women suffer from depression during menopause. She said that 25 to 30 per cent of menopausal women suffer from depression, but when they go to the doctor, the doctor will treat the depression but not think to look at whether the woman is going through menopause. Her whole thing was talking about the need to retrain not only some of our doctors, because they do not spend a lot of time during their training on menopause, but also women and men so they know that just because a woman has hit menopause it does not mean she is depressed: it could be her hormones causing the depression.

A very brave and funny woman got up and spoke about it. She talked about her journey through depression and menopause and how she ended up being hospitalised and basically held down and sedated. It was quite horrific to listen to what she went through, until a young doctor said, “My mum went through this. This is menopause. It isn't just depression or anxiety. You're going through menopause.”

We need to start looking at the two together, because the change in hormones in a woman's body has a huge effect on her brain. Yes, I remember going completely and utterly nuts at one point. That is probably not the medical term for it, but I know that I did things that were out of character and I spoke to people in a way that was out of character. I do not mean nicely; I mean I spoke to people in a way that was really out of character, and I had to go back and apologise. I was horrified at what I did. Unfortunately, the brain fog did not come in; I did not forget about it. The brain fog was there when I was asking the questions.

As middle-aged women or women who are menopausal, or whatever we want to say, we want a bit of understanding in the workplace and by our families. We suffer brain fog and our temperatures are a bit up and down, but also the depression and anxiety we are suffering might have a lot to do with our hormones. Remember when we were teenagers and those hormones hit. Dear God, what a ride I never want to go through again! Women going through menopause are losing a lot of those hormones. It is important that we keep discussing menopause, the effect it has on women, the effect it has on women in the workplace and the effect it has on them in society.

I would like to thank Natalie, the wonderful founder of Menopause Alliance Australia, for her enthusiasm—she was so enthusiastic and excited on Saturday—and the other 150 women in the room. There were great questions. It might have curled some people’s hair if they had heard some of the conversation topics. There were a lot of women there. Again, it is great to keep saying that menopause is a part of women’s lives. It is not going to change. People have to change around it.