NICE guidance on menopause: cognitive behavioural therapy is an effective non-hormonal intervention for managing vasomotor symptoms

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The full document of the first National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline on diagnosis and management of menopause recommends (page 18) that GPs should:

“Give information to menopausal women and their family members or carers (as appropriate) about the following types of treatment for menopausal symptoms:

• Hormonal, for example hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
• Non-hormonal, for example clonidine
• Non-pharmaceutical, for example cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).”

The evidence for CBT as a treatment for depressed mood and anxiety is included in the guidance, but CBT has also been developed to help women self manage vasomotor symptoms, and this evidence is not provided. Group and self help CBT have been shown to reduce the impact of these symptoms significantly in three clinical trials with more than 600 women (well women and women with breast cancer). Improvements are maintained 26 weeks after randomisation, there are additional benefits to quality of life, and no adverse effects were reported. The treatment is brief and available in self help format, with a group manual available for health professionals.

On the basis of this evidence, a recent position statement from the North American Menopause Society recommended CBT as an effective non-hormonal management option for vasomotor symptoms. Non-hormonal management of these symptoms is an important consideration when hormone therapy is not an option, because of either medical contraindications or a woman’s personal choice.

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