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Menopause: A Many-Splendored Thing

Joette Calabrese,HMC,CCH,RSHom

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If you thought you had the all the stereotypically unpleasant hallmarks of menopause conveniently pegged, think again. The many ennobling passages of a woman's life are intended neither by nature nor spiteful deities to be uncomfortable, disturbing or ugly. Particularly in the case of menopause, the palpability of womanhood holds court with the higher realms of wisdom. In fact, the menopausal journey can be a vivid time of celebration and fulfillment. There's something about being just past middle age that unites us. Kids are launched and a period of newly appreciating our husbands and other family members expands in delightful ways. The sage woman becomes a fount of wisdom and multi-faceted experience for her community. I sometimes want to link arms with women of this age around the world and shout in joyous unison, "We made it!" Now doesn't that approach sound better than the angst-ridden hype the drug companies portray as typical for menopausal women?

If you believe the doggerel of modern medicine, you'd imagine the bones of postmenopausal women audibly crumbling on cue sometime around age seventy, and "expired" uteruses lining up for perfunctory removal on the surgery-cure-all conveyor belt. Let me assure you that there is indeed another way for women to navigate this most promising passage in life's varied flow.

LIFE CHANGES ARE CHROMATIC

“I love color. As a child I adored pink, yet as I’ve aged, red has enchanted me. It’s the color of blood, especially in the sense of the healthy blush of vitality. Yet it also expresses the splendor of Christmas, and even the racy color of sports cars.” This is the way Isobel expressed herself.

Isobel was sixty, had raised a brood of five well-adjusted kids, and was married to the same man for over thirty-five years. (Fine job, Isobel.)

Isobel’s verve was expressed not only in her language, but in her dress, her home and even her intimate relationship with her husband. (He’s one happy guy, but she discreetly didn’t relay the details about that part.)

Nothing about this post-menopausal woman was boring. She had a firm hand on the tiller of her life. Sometimes, though, she would refer to the time about fifteen years ago as the storm that had rocked her foundation. She saved those recollections for when she knew it would benefit a younger woman entering the potential squall of menopause.

I hope Isobel will forgive me for recounting the old days before she grew into herself and before her familiarity with homeopathy, for it was a time when Isobel was not, shall we say, Isobel. Her skin showed signs of Father Time’s visits, she needed support for a sagging figure, and her behavior was more than eccentric. Her husband gingerly tip-toed around his tempestuous wife. Even Russell, their terrier, cowered when she entered the room.

On a recent occasion, Isobel offered advice to a younger version of herself: her niece, who’d asked Isobel, “Did you get hot flashes? Did you cry?” The questions from the forty-five-year-old woman inspired Isobel to share the story of her transition. She kicked off her sensible pumps, folded her legs

under her, and began her tale in Isobel-like fashion. She spoke through gnashed teeth as she relayed her story to accentuate the anger she had experienced during those years.

“I was a shrew and needed to be tamed, but the doctor I visited took that to mean I needed to be medicated. And she was a woman! Truth be told, she was a drug pusher: hormones, patches, sleeping meds, anti-depressants…she had all the nostrums of a witches’ brew. Foolishly, I took the stuff because I thought I had no choice. Isn’t it interesting that we usually associate being led by peers as the behavior of capricious teenagers? This was an example of how peer pressure kept me from questioning this doctor in my fifties. I followed her directives like an adolescent aping the cool kids at school!

“The doctor assured me the drug would correct a chemical imbalance and that no, there was no other way. I’ve since learned that when they tell me there are no other options, that means that’s all they’ve got and I need to find out for myself. Now I would do it differently. Today I would ask her to show me the ‘brain chemical’ tests that indicate such a preposterous idea and corresponding double-blind data proving the notion. I can see a broken bone on an x-ray or read a number on a blood panel, but I’ve never seen a chemical imbalance in a brain in black and white.”

Isobel explained that it took months of “drug therapy,” a term Isobel now calls an oxymoron, before noting that she had sunk into emotional numbness that prevented her from experiencing life. The doctor told her that the anti-depressant would eliminate anger and depression. But it was only a half-truth. Like making a pact with the devil, Isobel had gotten tripped up on the jargon. The doctor didn’t warn of a personality lobotomy. On the drugs, instead of being hysterical, Isobel became psychologically dead, pathetic and insipid. Instead of depression, she was emotionless. When her daughter-in-law announced that she was pregnant with their first child, Isobel

responded with a neutral “That’s nice.” Need I tell you that her family was concerned? Oddly enough, however, no one recognized that it was the drugs that had altered her personality since they all trusted the doctor’s advice. Surely she would not have prescribed anything that would harm Isobel.

That trusting belief shattered, however, when the family went to the shore for a two-week vacation. Isobel left her meds behind, whether inadvertently or intentionally it’s not clear, but it was all that was needed to redirect her course. But it still wasn’t easy. The drug had condemned Isobel to a purgatory from which she was obliged to climb during the weeks of withdrawal. She succumbed to tantrums, couldn’t sleep for many nights and vomited, but even that was worth suffering through since at least she began to show signs of a recognizable Isobel. Within a few days of abstinence there were glimpses of her old persona, and her family began welcoming her back. But the journey wasn’t over. Her anger and depression returned in a worsened state and she knew she had to find another solution and fast.

This is when her neighbor told her about a homeopathic remedy that had helped her through her menopausal passage. The neighbor said that she would not have been willing to part with the bottle had it been ten years earlier, but since she had completed menopause years ago, she gave Isobel what was left of the little pills. “My homeopath told me to take this once daily for about thirteen weeks, and I noticed a shift after the first two weeks. It was just me minus the ugliness, not me in an altered state.”

Isobel wasted no time in taking the remedy. She had been accustomed to using homeopathy to treat her children’s strep throats and ear infections when they were little, but didn’t realize that homeopathy could treat something as formidable as menopause, depression and anger.

The first person to note the shift in her was her husband. He

witnessed his wife soften to life again. She smiled at his teasing instead of disregarding his playful advances. He witnessed her renewed interest in preparing dinner and an extra bonus was her enhanced energy after her sleep was repaired. Isobel relayed all of this to her niece who listened eagerly.

THE REMEDY

The remedy Isobel's neighbor gave her was *Ammonium carbonicum*. Always characteristic to the specificity of homeopathy, this remedy will not be appropriate for a man, a child, or a younger woman for such tempests. It is, however, often one that is specific to the passage into, through and out of menopause. It is a special remedy designed especially for menopausal women, not by a drug company with a patent, but by the nature and characteristics of the original substance.

Ammonium carbonicum is also a remedy for chronic fatigue, mental sluggishness and feeling worse around and after menses. Dr. Margaret Tyler in *Homeopathic Drug Pictures* offers other uses. "There is relief from faintings and other neurological or cardiac symptoms, including heart palpitations that arise during the time of menopause." Dr. James Kent, who wrote *Lectures on Homeopathic Materia Medica* reports, "The menstrual blood is blackish, often in clots, leucorrhea is acrid, and there is violent tearing in abdomen and vagina. There is a sensation of deep-seated soreness in the whole pelvic viscera; at times it seems as if all her inner parts were raw."

Isobel never noticed these particular symptoms, but her neighbor confided that some of these kinds of pains led her to this remedy choice. Instead, Isobel suffered some of the near hysteria that Dr. Kent describes: "This remedy has [addresses] hysteria. The condition in the woman, if in a mild degree, is not hysterical, it belongs to the sensitive nature of women, but if carried to a more marked state it is hysterical."

These are clinical findings that homeopaths have garnered through the centuries. However, homeopathy also offers more insight into its double-blind data called provings. Excerpts from these medical provings of *Ammonium carbonicum* can be found in Dr. C. Hering's volumes entitled *The Guiding Symptoms of Our Materia Medica* as well as in Dr. Timothy F. Allen's work *The Encyclopedia of Pure Materia Medica*.

In Isobel's case, her passionate nature was forced into apathy by the anti-depressant drug. It threatened to destroy her personality; in fact, to obliterate the very essence of who she was. Indeed, if homeopathy were not available to right the wrongs, it would likely have been better to have simply put up with her outbursts for months, if not years, in an effort to save her from the scourges of chemical treatment. For someone else who might not be subject to such intense emotions the use of the same drug may have brought relief from anger only to cause depression to set in. Do we really want to chemically tamper with human dials? I think not.

Like august and dignified architecture, our maturing bodies and minds hold treasured secrets. We can take on the responsibility of being the master of these mysteries, or we can acquiesce to a patented, synthetic counterfeit inflicted upon us by an industry gone haywire. Flying buttresses provided by the likes of spandex and underwire bras are at least a harmless way to bolster old age. But chemical drugs are far more sinister than oversized falsies. They eventually reveal themselves to be dangerous counterfeits. By the time we reach this age, authenticity is what we most crave. No one minds a telling patina as long as the soul behind it is intact.

Diana Vreeland, who became editor of *Harper's Bazaar* at the age of sixty once said, "There's only one very good life and that's the one you know you want and you make it yourself."

Entering menopause is a journey of transformation that can be

matched and aided by the authentic nobility of a homeopathic remedy. Together they offer womanly self-empowerment that puts our hormonal house in order. This morning, Isobel painted her toenails red. “I like to look down at them peeking through my shoes,” she said. “It reminds me of how vibrant life can be.”

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