Menopausal Women’s Access Path to Bioidentical Hormone Replacement Therapy: An Exploratory.

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Abstract

The objective of this exploratory qualitative study was to describe (1) the key factors affecting women's initial decision to explore the use of bioidentical hormone, (2) where women gather their information on bioidentical hormones, (3) the enablers and barriers to obtaining bioidentical hormones, and (4) how to improve the bioidentical hormone replacement therapy access path.

The study was conducted in a compounding pharmacy located in a large urban area in southern Ontario, Canada. The participants included four postmenopausal women between the ages of 46 and 72 who self-identified as users of bioidentical hormone replacement therapy and with comprehensive provincial healthcare coverage. Participants were recruited at a compounding pharmacy with the use of tri-fold brochures, tear-sheets, and posters. The women participated in an audio-taped mini focus group. Discussion was guided by six open-ended questions. Verbatim quotes were analyzed using an affinity diagram. Participants identified three key factors related to their initial decision: (1) symptoms unalleviated by synthetic hormone replacement therapy, (2) side effects from synthetic hormone replacement therapy, and (3) personal preference. They obtained information and support from many sources, including: family/friends, publications, and specialists in menopausal health. Once participants had made a decision, they obtained a prescription and accessed bioidentical hormone replacement therapy at a compounding pharmacy. Knowledgeable primary care physicians and compounding pharmacists were seen as enablers. Lack of support/Information and costs were identifies as barriers. Improvements to bioidentical hormone replacement therapy access path were suggested.

The results of this study suggest that there may be value in implementing strategies to further encourage family physicians and other specialists in menopausal health to discuss options regarding hormone replacement therapy with patients. For example, the preparation and distribution of updated consumer decision aids that summarize the evidence on the options regarding hormone replacement therapy, including bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, could be considered.