

Wise Woman Wellness focuses on helping women with menopause

**By Jeanette Gerke
For the Wrihtstown Area Spirit**

Some things in life, like menopause, cannot be prevented. Menopause is a natural transition period in a woman's life that normally occurs between the ages of 40 and 60 as menstruation and fertility end. Although a woman's body changes during this time, her life doesn't have to, according to Randi Mann, NP, a menopause expert who helps women through their midlife transitions.

Mann, who recently opened Wise Woman Wellness at 1480 Swan Rd. in De Pere, has helped thousands of women suffering from the discomforts of hormone changes brought on by menopause. "I realized the medical field was frequently not meeting the needs of our mid-life patients. For most women, a yearly exam includes a pap, pelvic and breast exam. That's a lot in a 20 or 30 minute appointment, and very little time is left to address symptoms — many of which may be caused by hormone imbalances," she said.

As a credentialed Menopause Practitioner through the North American Menopause Society (NAMS), Mann is one of 43 menopause experts in Wisconsin.

For some women, midlife transitioning can be a challenging time. "Menopause is very individual for each woman," Mann said. "Some women breeze right through, but there are many women with hormone imbalances who suffer needlessly, not knowing there are natural options to alleviate uncomfortable symptoms," she said.

Most people are aware of the common menopause symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, vaginal dryness, decreased libido, fatigue, and weight changes. But women also frequently suffer from insomnia, anxiety, depression, back and joint pain, and excess sweating, which may be a result of changes in estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone levels. Menopause typically lasts five or more years and during this time, the ovaries make less of these hormones. The specific symptoms and how significant they are, ranging from mild, moderate, to severe, vary widely from woman to woman which is why diagnosis is such a challenge for many medical professionals.

Medical professionals may recommend hysterectomies and prescribe hormone replacement therapy, often referred to as HT or HRT, to ease the uncomfortable symptoms of menopause. However, several major studies have questioned the health benefits and risks of hormone replacement therapy, including the risk of developing breast cancer, heart attacks, strokes, and blood clots.

Mann says that her treatment offers alternative options and lifestyle adjustments that result in her patients "feeling better with more energy and more balanced lives," she said. "While traditional medications are effective in many cases, everyone is different." Wise Woman Wellness uses an integrative approach blending conventional medical care with complementary care to relieve symptoms. "I help women to see the connections

between their lack of exercise, unrelenting stress, poor diet choices and demands of children, partners, parents, and others and how this is impacting their health."

Integrative medicine involves using traditional as well as complementary treatment options to treat the patient holistically. The methods used at Wise Woman Wellness are the same that were featured on the Oprah show and in best-selling books by holistic health experts Dr. Andrew Weil, Dr. Christiane Northrup, and Marla Ahlgrimm, R.P.H. "Women are asking for it. They often need more time and attention to discuss their hormonal issues with their doctors or nurse practitioners. They want to take an active role in their health care, and they are looking for answers. That's what led me to start Wise Woman Wellness," Mann said.

As the former director of the Bellin Center for Health and Healing Midlife Program, Mann developed their menopause treatment program. She continues to work on a limited basis at Women's Specialty providing limited OB/GYN care. Getting a doctor's referral to her practice is not necessary. Visits are generally covered by insurance at the "out of



Jeanette Gerke photo

Randi Mann recently opened Wise Woman Wellness in De Pere to help women deal with menopause issues.

network" rate. She focuses on just menopause care at Wise Woman Wellness and encourages patients to continue to seek regular care from their healthcare providers.

Mann says that what she does is a science but also an art. She begins by meeting with her patient for a 90-minute appointment to understand and assess her symptoms. The woman may be sent home with a saliva and urine test kit that is used to evaluate hormone levels and daily bone loss.

Blood hormone tests may also be ordered. Mann reviews the lab report showing the optimal range for various hormones, and if appropriate, she prescribes a customized, low dose, natural hormone medication, called a "bio-identical compound."

Pharmacy compounding is the art and science of preparing individualized medications in precise doses to meet the specific needs of each patient. Mann says that quality compounding pharmacies make it easier to tailor dosages for each patient outside of the traditional "one-size-fits-all" medication.

"With compounding, patients get only what they need because it is a customized dose. This is important in treating hormone imbalances because even a tenth of a milligram can make a difference," Mann explained. "I look at all parts of the hormone puzzle and figure out how it all fits together to find the unique balance that is right for each patient."

Some of Mann's patients travel from as far away as Georgia for her specialized service. "Women appreciate us taking the time to listen and to offer solutions that go beyond standard drugs. Antidepressants, anti-inflammatories, anti-anxiety, and sleeping pills are all prescribed medications, but perhaps the underlying problem has not been addressed," Mann said.

Nevertheless, some health experts urge caution when using bio-identical compounds. According to Dr. Margery Gass, Executive Director of the North American Menopause Society (NAMS), there may be some risks to using custom compounded

hormones. "Women should know that the estrogens used in compounded bio-identical products are purchased from a lab in the same way as other pharmaceutical hormones. They are marketed as 'natural' as though they are derived from flowers or leaves, when in reality they are synthetically produced in a lab," she said.

Gass, who is an OB/GYN medical doctor, advises caution when it comes to taking hormones that are deemed "natural."

"These medications do not have FDA approval because individually mixed drugs have not been tested to prove that the active ingredients are absorbed appropriately or provide predictable levels in blood and tissue. There is no evidence they are safer than other hormones that are approved by the FDA. There should be a product insert saying they carry the same risks," Gass said.

She went on to say that NAMS maintains that salivary and blood testing for hormone levels used by custom compounders to determine dosages are questionable for premenopausal women because their hormone levels vary widely. "Testing must be done over a large number of women before these claims can be made," she said.

"All patients who use compounded hormone therapy drugs should discuss menopausal hormone therapy options with their health care provider to determine if compounded drugs are the best option for their specific medical needs," she said. "(Bio-identical hormones) have been an incredible marketing success, but there is no evidence that they are

Wise Woman Wellness

Monthly seminars are held at Wise Woman Wellness to learn about natural options to relieve discomforts of menopause.

1st and 3rd Wednesdays

6:30 - 8 p.m.

2nd Fridays

8:30 - 10 a.m.

Call to register 339-5252.

Wise Woman Wellness is located at 1480 Swan Rd., De Pere. For more information, visit www.wisewoman-wellnessllc.com

Possible symptoms of menopause

Fatigue

Hot flashes and night sweats, flushed skin

Trouble controlling urine (leaking)

Headaches

Mood swings including irritability, depression, and anxiety

Lack of sex drive

Bloating/water retention

Difficulty falling and staying asleep

Memory problems/forgetfulness, foggy thinking

Acne/oily skin

Thinning hair, growth of facial hair, brittle nails

Food cravings

Muscle weakness or loss of strength

Decreased focus or attention span

Loss of skin tone

Weight loss or weight gain

Low back and/or joint pain

Unable to tolerate cold

Heavy and/or irregular periods

Excess sweating

Heart pounding and/or irregular heart-beat

Dry Eyes

Bone thinning

any safer than any other estrogen," she said.

More information is available on the N A M S Web site at www.menopause.org

Mann points out that compounded hormones are regulated through state boards of pharmacy and hence do not need FDA approval. She hears regularly from women that her personalized care has alleviated life-limiting symptoms. "I help women understand their bodies. I take their needs seriously and help them manage the changes that happen

during midlife," Mann said. "We work together as a team to create solutions to make life a little easier."