

## PERIMENOPAUSAL

### *I. What the Perimenopausal Woman Wants and Needs from Her Physician*

- Most women in the United States experience menopause between the ages of 45 and 55. Many women begin to experience changes in their menstrual cycles in their early 40s, and for some the transition is not fully complete until their late 50s.
- During the perimenopausal years, women begin to shift their focus from reproductive health care to other nonreproductive health issues. General health and wellness, and prevention of chronic disease and disability, become more viable concerns.
- Women in midlife take prevention seriously and look to their health care provider to recommend routine screenings, to counsel about lifestyle issues, and to become familiar with their family histories.
- The physician becomes the arbiter of science, the expert who can efficiently weigh the various claims and reports and help a woman make sense of them in terms of her history, her values, and her choices.
- Probably no issue better illustrates the gulf that sometimes exists between practitioners and the public than questions regarding the role of hormone replacement therapy. Whereas many physicians enthusiastically endorse hormone replacement therapy for treatment of menopausal symptoms, and for longer-term use to prevent osteoporosis and decrease the risk of heart disease and cognitive difficulties, women have been more reluctant to embrace it.
- The goal of counseling should not be to persuade a woman to accept a specific recommendation, but rather to educate a woman so that she can make an informed decision.
- Informed choices about therapy include an understanding of the purpose and duration of treatment, whether short- or long-term, and the expected benefits and risks.
- When provided a choice, many women prefer a comprehensive woman's health center at which most of her basic health care needs are met in a single visit. Beyond patient convenience, comprehensive centers can offer education and counseling services and access to a range of providers, including physicians, psychologists, nurses and nurse practitioners, and dietitians, working together as part of an integrated team.
- Women entering menopause today want information in order to make informed choices, convenient access to care, and assistance with preventing illness and disability.