

## **The Lived Experience of Peri-Menopausal and Menopausal Women Who Take Bio-Identical Hormones**

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There are an unprecedented number of women reaching middle age, and the impact of peri-menopause and menopause is becoming a significant public health topic. Women and practitioners are searching for alternatives to traditional hormone replacement therapy (HRT). There are many alternatives available to choose from; however, research with large-scale prospective studies has not been adequately documented. Women enter peri-menopause with little factual knowledge about its effects and treatments, but with expectations that are influenced by myths and misinformation.

A growing number of Baby Boomers, who are now reaching the age of menopause, are choosing to treat symptoms of menopause through hormone replacement therapy using natural compounded bio-identical progesterone and estrogen hormones. Bio-identical hormones are compounded natural hormones derived from plant oils found in both the Mexican wild yam and other plants that are similar in structure to human hormones.

The aim of this research study was to describe the lived experience of peri-menopausal and menopausal women taking bio-identical hormone replacement therapy (BHRT). A phenomenological research design was used to investigate these phenomena. Nine women between the ages of 43 and 57, currently taking BHRT, were interviewed to gain an understanding of their personal experiences.

The reduction of data produced nine themes: Natural Treatment, Physician-Patient Disconnection, Symptoms Negatively Impact Quality of Life, Quality of Life Improved with BHRT, Self-Advocacy, Holistic Healthcare, Seeking Alternatives, Information Seeking, and Resistance to Change. From this, the essence of this study emerged. The old negative connotation of “the change of life” has been transcended to a positive “wow, the change of life”.

There is a paradigm shift toward complementary and alternative medicine in the United States because individuals are finding this to be more compatible with their beliefs, values and philosophies about health care. Nursing implications resulting from this study include the identification of the importance of holistic nursing care, the need for nursing education to emphasize health promotion, and the value that holistic nurse practitioners contribute to patient care.