

# HHN Partners with Red Hot Mamas

The Endocrine Society's Hormone Health Network (HHN) has partnered with peer-to-peer support organization Red Hot Mamas to bring fresh, new resources to women, including educational materials and patient guides for menopausal women, as well as information for endocrinologists.



One educational resource in particular is HHN's Menopause Map, an online tool to help women and their doctors discuss which hormonal and non-hormonal treatment options would be most effective and safe to relieve the sometimes debilitating symptoms of menopause, the result of partnerships with organizations like the Red Hot Mamas.

"We're really excited [about the partnership] because we understand the value that the peer-to-peer support brings to our education materials in general," HHN director Cheretta A. Clerkley says. "The primary goal of the Network is to educate and inform patients; collaborating with peer support groups, like the Red Hot Mamas, enables us to reach patients through their own networks that they trust and provide the educational materials they need."

## Lost and Found

Red Hot Mamas — the largest menopause education organization in North America — was founded by Karen Giblin in 1991 as a response to the frustration she felt when she began going through menopause after a hysterectomy. At the time, Giblin was serving her third term as selectman in Ridgefield, Conn.

After her hysterectomy, Giblin returned to work but began experiencing the initial stages of menopause, the

"devilish duo" of hot flashes and night sweats, which inevitably lead to insomnia. "I was fatigued, and I became really forgetful," she says, "due to a lot of lack of sleep." Giblin says her doctor had prepared her for the surgery, but not the accompanying menopause symptoms, "and this new way of life, taking estrogen therapy."

"I didn't have enough information," Giblin says. "I felt like I was lost in the Bermuda Triangle." It took about a year for the estrogen therapy to finally start working, to "quell a lot of the symptoms."

Giblin parlayed her public office into a beacon of hope for women in her community, many of whom were her constituents, who not only inquired about Giblin's health, but also "openly confided" in Giblin about their own menopause issues and wanted solutions for themselves.

"I just decided that I wanted to show some leadership in my community," Giblin says. Soon, she was hosting and developing her own menopause help and support program so that women could "know everything that they could possibly know" about menopause and what to expect when it arrives and how to manage its course, so "they can optimize their health through the menopause transition."

Giblin named her 12-month support programs Red Hot Mamas, off of a suggestion from her daughter, who noted that Giblin was a "red hot mama" during the hot flashes. From there, "the rest is history," Giblin says. "It mushroomed into the largest menopause education program in the United States and Canada," available in more than 200 hospitals and physician group practices.

The programs cover myriad topics, from hormone therapy to breast health, and even other endocrine

disorders, such as diabetes and thyroid conditions, allowing participants to share their stories, questions, and concerns, supporting each other, peer to peer. There's even a robust online community where women can find answers, information, or just have a digital shoulder to lean on.

Giblin also wants Red Hot Mamas to stress positive lifestyle changes during the transition: eating well, smoking cessation, managing stress, and even maintaining a positive attitude. "I always tell women they gotta keep that twinkle in their wrinkle," she says.

## The M-Word

As with any endeavor worth pursuing, there were struggles. "It hasn't been all that easy," Giblin says. For one thing, in the early 1990s, "you couldn't even say that M-word out loud." As such, there was very little literature on menopause, and the books that were available, like Dr. Lila Nachtigall's *Estrogen: Yes or No?* (which Giblin referred to as "her bible") had to be hidden under magazines. "I didn't want anyone to know I was in menopause," she admits.

But as Giblin's education programs grew and spread, and discussions of the M-word became more prevalent in her local community and then nationwide, the need to feel embarrassed and hide helpful books became less commonplace. "We really brought it to the forefront of discussion," she says.

Still, there was work to be done. The next step was establishing credibility with medical professionals and the media. Giblin had that covered, too. She presented research conducted through the Red Hot Mamas program at the North American Menopause Society's meetings and was an invited speaker at the International Menopause Society's Global Summit on menopause in Zurich, Switzerland. "I had to prove

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myself," she says. Now, most major media outlets look to Giblin and the Red Hot Mamas whenever any new information about menopause crops up.

"But one of the biggest struggles we have today is health education budgets in hospitals have really been cut in a lot of ways," Giblin says. "It's unfortunate, because a lot of women need a lot of information during the menopause transition. That makes it really difficult to implement our Red Hot Mamas program in hospitals."

### With a Little Help from My Friends

Red Hot Mamas' partnership with HHN provides an opportunity to

work with endocrinologists directly, according to Giblin. "I'm certain [endocrinologists] are receiving lots of questions from menopausal women," she says. Menopausal women are turning to their endocrinologists with questions about diabetes and obesity, thyroid conditions, and libido issues, to name a few. "Working with the Hormone Health Network will help bring information to not only the general public," but also to physicians, by sharing information that the Red Hot Mamas have learned.

"This is the first time we've partnered with a group like the Red Hot Mamas to develop an online, comprehensive tool," Clerkley explains. The

team-up allows the Red Hot Mamas to have a hand in all aspects of the Menopause Map's development and evolution. "By partnering with [the Red Hot Mamas], we feel like we'll come out with a stronger tool, but at the same time be empowering women with the education that they need and providing endocrinologists with the information they may not be aware of, as well."

"The peer-to-peer support is so important to women," Giblin says. "Having women support each other is a very essential thing to having good health."

For more information, check out the Red Hot Mamas at [www.redhotmamas.org](http://www.redhotmamas.org). **EN**

— Derek Bagley



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