

POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

Muneebah Jasat, Trainee Biomedical Scientist and member of the IBMS Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, writes about an overlooked issue in the workplace.

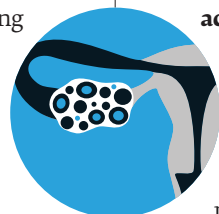
Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) affects one in 10 females in the UK. It is an endocrine disorder that is caused by an underlying hormone imbalance. Polycystic ovaries contain small cysts, that are no bigger than 8mm and are usually located just below the surface of the ovaries. The “cysts” are not like true cysts that contain liquid; in fact, they are follicles that have not matured properly to be ovulated.

PCOS is one of the leading causes of fertility problems in women and if not managed properly it can lead to additional health problems. It is also a condition that can impact a woman’s appearance and self-esteem.

Each female with PCOS has different symptoms. Some of the symptoms of PCOS include:

- Irregular periods or complete lack of periods
- No ovulation or irregular ovulation
- Reduced fertility
- Acne
- Weight problems - being overweight, rapid weight gain, difficulty losing weight
- Depression and mood swings.

Long-term health complications associated with PCOS are shown to have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and a higher risk of endometrial cancer. There is no cure or single treatment for PCOS. When treatment is provided to females with PCOS, it is aimed at



managing the symptoms, which will help reduce long-term health risks.

How can you help people with PCOS?

- **Make people aware of any help your trust provides** to support people with PCOS through occupational health
- **Allow time off** or flexible time for medical appointments
- **Implement** a health and wellbeing programme
- **Make rooms/ bathrooms more**

accessible. As an irregular period is one of the most common symptoms of PCOS, females may start their period unexpectedly. Ensuring that bathrooms are well stocked with menstrual products, it is a good way to show

consideration. Ensuring the office or staff rooms are open and friendly with comfy seats so people can take a moment to rest.

- **Encourage compassionate dialogue and a supportive atmosphere.** Every individual with PCOS has different experiences and symptoms. It is important as a team to not comment on people’s physical appearance, gossip, and say harmful comments that could affect a person’s self-esteem. Everyone in the workplace should feel included and accepted, by ensuring that your laboratory is a safe space for all genders. This must be a priority as PCOS also affects non-binary and trans people. Most importantly, listen to employees who have PCOS and take their feedback on board, as it can make a big difference to their quality of life both in and outside the workplace. 