Press Release

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Avanti West Coast supports colleagues affected by menopause with drop-in session

- *Avanti West Coast hosts first menopause drop-in for staff*
- *Latest initiative to support colleagues affected by menopause*
- *Efforts to get people talking was idea of Avanti West Coast employee*

Avanti West Coast has hosted its first drop-in session to support colleagues affected by menopause spearheaded by an employee who wanted to raise awareness of the subject.

Designed to provide support for women at Avanti West Coast, the drop-in follows the introduction of the intercity operator's menopause guidance – a resource for employees that helps understanding of the subject with hints, tips, and signposting to support.

Held at Preston station, the session was aimed at women who are experiencing symptoms, as well anyone wanting to learn more about their relative or friend who may be going through the menopause.

The drop-in was the idea of Customer Service Assistant, Hellen Briscoe, who is making a determined effort to raise awareness of menopause in the workplace and reduce the taboo around the topic.

After being diagnosed with perimenopause at the age of 37, Hellen, now 39, found being open about her experience has helped her deal with the symptoms and emotions she was going through.

Since joining Avanti West Coast's 'Menopause for thought' group – a forum for people to discuss how the intercity operator can better support employees around menopause – Hellen learned colleagues affected by the menopause had struggled silently.

Spurred on by these conversations, she decided to organise a drop-in to encourage people to talk and share their experiences with one another.

"Talking about menopause openly and trying to support other women has helped me. I think so many of us need that help and support without realising it. Women need to know they're not alone", explained Hellen.

To provide further advice for those attending, Hellen reached out to well-known media personalities, including Andrea McLean, who have shared their stories to ask for materials.

"I've gained a lot of helpful advice and a better understanding of the menopause by following celebrities, doctors and specialists on social media, so I felt heard and elated by their positive response. Andrea sent me a lovely note which made me realise just why I wanted to do this in the first place", said Hellen.

Employees from across the business came to talk and listen to their colleagues in the first event of its kind on the west coast, which is part of the train operator's commitment to create an inclusive workforce. Some were given a menopause survival kit containing tea, chocolate, and token items to make women smile and show an understanding of what they're going through.

Reflecting on the drop-in, Hellen said: "We need to talk about menopause. For some reason it has been a taboo subject. This baffles me, as all women will go through it – some will sail through it, others will struggle but either way we all need to be aware of what the menopause is and what to look out for.

"Those who came to the drop-in stayed a while, chatted to people they didn't know, offered their advice, and listened to others. Some came on their days off, which proves some women need this. Not a lot is known by the younger generation, so the event was not only for us now, but for those in the future.

"I hope everyone who attended took away some comfort in knowing they can talk to me anytime, as well as giving them a much better understanding of the menopause and how we can all have our own journeys but together we can get through it more easily.

"I am eager to gain a community in the workplace, where we feel listened to, understood, and not embarrassed about menopause – not just in the workplace but our everyday life."

The positive response to the drop-in has inspired Hellen, who is doing a menopause awareness course, to deliver similar events at other locations along the route.

ENDS

Read why Avanti West Coast introduced menopause guidance: "It's important to share what we're doing on a topic that affects women, while raising awareness" (avantiwestcoast.co.uk)

About Avanti West Coast

Avanti West Coast, operator of intercity rail services on the West Coast Main Line, is a joint venture between FirstGroup and Trenitalia, delivering a cleaner, greener railway that drives the West Coast forward.

We're on a mission to revolutionise train travel. Our refurbed Pendolinos are returning to the rails, with a £117m investment that's delivering best in class comfort. Rebuilt using sustainable materials wherever possible, including tables made from recycled plastic bottles, our upgraded fleet offers 25,000 brand new seats, free Wi-Fi, onboard recycling and much more.

New Hitachi trains are set to replace our Voyager trains from 2023, leading to a 61% cut in carbon emissions. Quieter and roomier, with more reliable Wi-Fi, wireless charging for electrical devices and a real-time customer information system, the new 23-strong fleet is the result of a £350m investment in sustainable travel.

We're tackling climate change wherever we can, from reducing energy and water use to training drivers in eco-driving techniques and sourcing food and drink from local suppliers. Our goal is to be net zero carbon by 2031. We're on track.

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