

# **‘Red Hot Mommas’ educate women on menopause**

Women going through menopause don't have to feel alone.

“Red Hot Mommas,” a two-year-old program at Good Samaritan Hospital in Baltimore, offers information and support for dealing with a time of life that can often be confusing or intimidating.

“One of the biggest misconceptions about menopause is that women think there is nothing they can do about it,” said Debbie Bena, Good Samaritan's community outreach nurse. “Our goal is to empower women with the knowledge of what is happening to their bodies.”

Menopause, the end of menstruation and fertility, happens at different times for different women. Although some women can go through it as early as age 40, Ms. Bena said, the average age is the early 50s. She noted that menopause is not an overnight process. It happens in stages as ovaries produce less estrogen and progesterone. Common symptoms include hot flashes, sleeplessness, mood swings, forgetfulness and vaginal dryness.

Although women who have gone through menopause are at higher risk for heart disease and osteoporosis, Ms. Bena said there are preventative measures like aerobic exercise and healthy diets that can reduce that risk.

Menopausal women should talk with their doctors about whether hormone therapy is appropriate for dealing with symptoms like hot flashes, Ms. Bena said. She emphasized that hormone therapy or medications are not the only answers.

“People think you take hormones or you suffer,” said Ms. Bena, a parishioner of the Shrine of St. Alphonsus in downtown Baltimore. “There are a lot of ways to manage the symptoms.”

She cited exercise as a possible alternative to medication for dealing with mood swings, adding that women should talk with their doctors to determine what's right

for them.

“Red Hot Mommas” presents bimonthly seminars by medical doctors about various topics related to menopause. About 50 women attend the free program, Ms. Bena said.

“It’s not a support group,” she explained, “but it serves that purpose because women get to meet other people dealing with the same issues.”

For more information or to register, call 443-444-4100.