

Government orders action on 'chemical cosh' which kills thousands

Ministers are to order a clampdown on the use of drugs which kill thousands of elderly people every year.

By [Laura Donnelly](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/laura-donnely/) (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/laura-donnely/), Health Correspondent

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Doctors will be told to stop prescribing too many medications which act as a "chemical cosh" for those with dementia, and shorten the lives of 1,800 people a year.

The action is part of a plan to improve the care of those with dementia, by improving the training of nurses and doctors, and closely monitoring the quality of services provided by care homes and hospitals.



Care Minister Paul Burstow has been campaigning for years against the misuse of such drugs.
Photo: PHOTOSHOT

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Care homes will be told to review the use of all medications given to people with dementia, to reduce the numbers of people prescribed antipsychotic drugs which should only be used as a last resort.

Last year a major report found that 180,000 patients are prescribed the treatments each year, despite the fact they do not benefit three quarters of those given them, and can cause death, or major side effects, such as strokes.

Care Minister Paul Burstow has been campaigning for years against the misuse of such drugs.

He told *The Sunday Telegraph*: "Far too many prescriptions of antipsychotics are not clinically justified and can lead to premature death. We want to dramatically cut the use of these drugs among elderly people.

On Tuesday, he will announce a plan, expected to be backed by around £200m funding, to improve all aspects of dementia care, so that sufferers are diagnosed earlier, and receive better care when they are in hospitals and care homes.

Training for GPs will be boosted, so that the condition is detected sooner, with more people referred to specialist clinics which can distinguish between everyday memory problems and the first signs of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease.

All local services will be required to publish detailed information about the quality of service they provide.

Mr Burstow said: "The system at the moment often works around failure and crisis management of elderly care. We must change that.

"Large numbers of people are left undiagnosed with dementia which means patients and their families don't know what is happening or how to plan ahead until it is too late.

"We want to get earlier identification so patients can have a more dignified journey through the condition."

Prof Alistair Burns, national clinical director for dementia, said staff caring for those with dementia needed to try to find alternative ways to deal with patients when they became agitated.

In one pilot scheme, two thirds of residents in a care home who were on antipsychotic medication were taken off the drugs after their cases were reviewed.

Alternative strategies, such as attempting to detect the triggers for agitation, could be more effective, said Prof Burns.

The professor of old age psychiatry at the University of Manchester cited the case of an elderly widow with dementia who became anxious every evening at 6pm.

After sensitive questioning, staff realised that her agitation stemmed from thinking that she ought to be preparing her husband's evening meal.

Once she was given the task of setting tables for other residents at the end of each day, her anxiety was reduced.

More than 700,000 people in Britain are believed to suffer from dementia, a figure which is predicted to rise to more than 1 million within a decade, as the population ages.

Among those over the age of 65, one in three will die with a form of the disease.

Prof Burns said: "We know that two thirds of people suffering from dementia never get a diagnosis, which should be the starting point to ensure that they can get support and interventions which can help to delay crises".

The Government's strategy will require NHS organisations to publish detailed data on the quality of services provided for those suffering from the condition.

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davee44

Yesterday 06:43 PM

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The sad thing is that this was reported about over 5 years ago and nothing changed. The doctors are burned out and just go on giving drugs even though it shortens the life span. A filmmaker showed the link between ALL Dementia and blood sugar. The cause of diabetes and obesity is food chemicals but the drug companies will never reveal this

see here <http://spirithappy.wordpress.com> (<http://spirithappy.wordpress.com>)

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MJHopeC

Yesterday 12:48 PM

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Replying to d_j

I do not where this reply will end up. Discus is playing gaames today

I hope and wish that should I ever get to this state (or even before it) that a sensible law regarding assisted suicide is enacted. But intelligence is not something politicians aare endowed with!

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The Minister could do well to Read Prof Joel Kauffman's book *Malignant Medical Myths*

Apart from anything else, in the US the third largest killer is iatrogenic deaths which includes deaths adverse reactions, hospital acquired infections, over-medicalisation etc.

But he is up against Big Pharma and its KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders). As an example, the FDA recently fined Pfizers \$2.5 billion which would have resulted in Pfizers being banned from supplying Medicare and Medicaid. Result Pfizers bought a small company that then admitted guilt thus letting Pfizers and the US Administration of the hook!

A lesson in fiddles

telegraph.co.uk/.../Government-orders...

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bogwart

Yesterday 01:31 PM

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We're not in the US and not so corrupted by the Big Pharma lobbies. I'm not saying we're not affected by them, but they don't lead us by the nose.

I don't know from where you get your figures on iatrogenic deaths. According to the CDC the figures are as follows for 2007, the most recent year analysed:

- Heart disease: 616,067
- Cancer: 562,875
- Stroke (cerebrovascular diseases): 135,952
- Chronic lower respiratory diseases: 127,924
- Accidents (unintentional injuries): 123,706
- Alzheimer's disease: 74,632
- Diabetes: 71,382
- Influenza and Pneumonia: 52,717
- Nephritis, nephrotic syndrome, and nephrosis: 46,448
- Septicemia: 34,828

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MJHopeC

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You must be joking! what about swine flu, Vioxx, Avandia etc?

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bogwart

Yesterday 05:43 PM

What about them?

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MJHopeC

Today 11:38 AM

Oh goodness you really do not keep up! Swine-flu was a put-up job by WHO; VIOXX is estimated to have killed tens, if not hundreds, of thousands and Merck knew that it killed for 3.5 years before it was taken off the market; AVANDIA has just been suspended in the EUSSR and USA. Many were aware of the problem at least two years ago.

That is what is about them - satisfied?

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[jrtmedic \(http://my.telegraph.co.uk/members/jrtmedic\)](http://my.telegraph.co.uk/members/jrtmedic)

Yesterday 09:07 AM

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Perhaps Paul Burstow would like to spend some time demonstrating how to care for unmedicated violent, eye scratching, feaces throwing old people.

The challenge posed by the demented elderly , to staff in under-resourced "care" facilities is enormous. Resorting to medication is usually a last and only resort to the problem.

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oakwoodbank

Yesterday 08:16 AM

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It is not just those with dementia who suffer from the over/wrong prescribing of drugs. Those with learning disabilities (so called) are often the victims of medical coshing. Many of these people have little ability to complain or have independent advocates. The government needs to take a look into this sector as well.

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[ankles \(http://my.telegraph.co.uk/members/ankles\)](http://my.telegraph.co.uk/members/ankles)

Yesterday 01:56 AM

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At the aged care facility I work in these drugs are only occassionally used.The reason being that some people with dementia can become very abusive and sometimes aggressive or violent towards staff and other residents.These people are difficult to manage and given the chronic understaffing in most facilities sometimes they have little choice but to resort to drugs as they simply do not have enough staff to care for these people properly

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[d_j \(http://my.telegraph.co.uk/members/d_j\)](http://my.telegraph.co.uk/members/d_j)

09/25/2010 10:48 PM

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When I get dementia that is so bad that I am agitated and not easily controllable in a nursing home, I do hope that someone will give me drugs that shorten my undignified life and the misery for my family - and with luck that will also make it easier for the nurses to care for me.

I seem out of step with the government sound-bites.

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jebedee

09/25/2010 09:16 PM

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9/27/2010

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So, 135,000 people were given drugs which did not benefit them. The pharmaceutical companies make huge profits from this. What is the difference between such companies and the illegal drugs barons?

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Grumpytom

09/25/2010 10:11 PM

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Tax, shareholders, vested interests.

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