**Women suffering worse dementia care than men: Female patients are being seen less frequently by GPs and not getting the same checks as males**

* **Vulnerable women with dementia are being abandoned in their old age**
* **Female dementia patients are seen less frequently by their GPs than men**
* **Experts have examined the health records of 68,000 dementia patients**

By [Ben Spencer, Medical Correspondent For The Daily Mail](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/search.html?s=&authornamef=Ben+Spencer,+Medical+Correspondent+For+The+Daily+Mail)

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Vulnerable women with dementia are being abandoned in old age by a health system offering them worse care than men, a major report concludes today.

Female dementia patients are seen less frequently by their GPs than men, are not given the same checks and tests, and are more regularly given sedative drugs to control behaviour.

Experts at University College London, who examined the health records of 68,000 dementia patients over a decade, found a significant gulf in care between men and women.

Charities said the findings raised 'grave concerns' about the state of dementia care for women and called for GPs to pay special attention to female dementia patients.

The authors of the research found women were 18 per cent more likely than men to be given antipsychotic or sedative medications – treatments which many regard as unsuitable for people with dementia.

Patients are often given the drugs to control their behaviour, an action that critics describe as handing out a 'chemical cosh'.

The team, whose results are published today in the journal Age and Ageing, also discovered GPs saw women 10 per cent less frequently than men, weighed them 9 per cent less often, and checked their blood pressure 4 per cent less frequently.

Each of these measures is crucial to monitoring a dementia patient's state of health and the progress of their disease.

Although some of the differences were small, the researchers said the overall pattern was clear – women are slipping through the net.

Because women tend to live longer than men, and so are more likely to be widowed, they are more often left living alone as their health deteriorates, the team said.

Study leader Dr Claudia Cooper, a psychiatrist who specialises in old age care, said: 'Women are more likely to be left by themselves.

**LET ELDERLY HELP OUT IN SCHOOLS**

Older people at risk of loneliness should be signed up to walking groups and encouraged to help children read in school, an NHS watchdog has said.

NICE, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, is calling for public bodies to work together to tackle loneliness in old age. It says councils and the voluntary sector should identify the lonely, who may include the recently widowed, those who live alone with little opportunity to socialise and those who have given up driving.

Health officials recommend dancing or swimming clubs, arts and walking groups and community choirs.

And it suggests younger people could be encouraged to befriend the older generation, such as helping them use new technologies. Retired people could return the favour, going into schools to help children read.

Professor Gillian Leng, deputy chief executive of NICE, said: 'Everyone is affected differently by aging and whilst many older people can remain independent we need to do more to help those who can't.'

'In many ways the issue is about how much we rely on family carers. You are significantly disadvantaged if you are by yourself with dementia.'

She added: 'We found women were more likely to be on psychotropic drugs – sedatives or antipsychotics – which can be harmful in the long term and may not be appropriate. Women tended to stay on such drugs for longer, perhaps because they have fewer check-ups to see if the drugs were still needed.

'Women with dementia who live on their own may need additional support accessing healthcare services.' The findings come at a time of serious questions over dementia care in this country.

The Government's first Ofsted-style audit revealed in September that 57 per cent of health boards in England were providing inadequate dementia care.

Charities say those without close relatives nearby are left relying on 'threadbare social care services'.

The Office for National Statistics last month revealed dementia had become the biggest cause of death in England and Wales, overtaking heart disease for the first time.

George McNamara, head of policy at the Alzheimer's Society, said: 'Everyone with dementia should have an annual review, but this research raises some grave concerns that women, who are disproportionately affected by the condition, aren't getting the support they need. What is particularly worrying is that medication isn't being reviewed regularly, which could lead to the prolonged and unnecessary use of antipsychotics.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-4000162/Women-suffering-worse-dementia-care-men-Female-patients-seen-frequently-GPs-not-getting-checks-males.html#ixzz4WDgcnUQ6>   
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