Female dementia sufferers get worse medical treatment than men

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5 DECEMBER 2016 • 6:01AM

Women suffering from dementia in the UK receive worse medical treatment than men with the condition, new research suggests.

The gender gap shows women make fewer visits to GPs, get less health monitoring and take more potentially harmful drugs than men.

Researchers at University College London examined the medical records of 68,000 dementia patients and 259,000 people without dementia using The Health Improvement Network (THIN) database.

Despite being more vulnerable to physical and mental illness the study, published in Age and Ageing, showed patients with dementia received less medical care that those without.

Overall they had 10 per cent fewer consultations, were 9 per cent less likely to undergo checks for weight loss and were around one fifth more likely to be put on powerful drugs known as “the chemical cosh.”

Women are more likely than men to suffer from diseases such as dementia, living longer and being more likely to be alone when disease sets in.

This could be one of the reasons why women were denied checks, and instead put on heavy medication, researchers said.

Psychiatrist Dr Claudia Cooper, who led the research, said: "Women are more likely to get Alzheimer's-related dementia than men.

"They also live longer and so are more likely to be without the friends and family who would normally spot the signs of dementia, and encourage the women to seek medical help.

"We found that women were more likely to be on psychotropic drugs - sedatives or anti-psychotics - 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."

Dr Cooper added: "Because women tend to live longer than men, they are more likely to live alone without a family carer to help them access healthcare.

"Perhaps because of this, they are more at risk of missing out on medical help that might help them stay well for longer. "

Dr Cooper said GPs should ensure elderly women came in for more checks, as weight loss and blood pressure changes could be an indicator of dementia.

Earlier this year a study suggested that hundreds of care homes are still regularly using a [“chemical cosh”](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/health/news/6453228/Health-trusts-failing-to-cut-use-of-chemical-cosh-drugs.html) of powerful drugs to quieten difficult dementia patients, despite a national review into the practice.

A study from five universities found no overall reduction in the prescribing of antipsychotics in UK care homes between 2009 and 2012, three years after the Government launched the[National Dementia Strategy](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/rebecca-smith/6981008/Dementia-sufferers-being-failed-National-Audit-Office.html).

In 2012, 77 per cent of treatments using the drugs were described as “excessive” and lasting for longer than the recommended six weeks, the report found.