Statins controversy may have caused THOUSANDS of heart attacks, study suggests

CONTROVERSY over statins led to 200,000 patients stopping taking the cholesterol-lowering drugs during one six-month period, a study suggests.

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As a result, about 2,000 may suffer a heart attack or stroke over the next 10 years, experts have predicted.

Stains are generally safe but side effects such as nausea and joint pain may affect up to 10 per cent of people, while one in 100 can suffer more serious problems.

While medical experts disagreed about how many statin users suffered side effects, two articles in The British Medical Journal (BMJ) in 2013 suggested that, for healthy people at low risk of heart disease, the risk of side effects could outweigh the health benefits of taking the pills.

Then in 2014 statins hit the headlines again after the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence suggested that more people should take the pills to prevent future heart disease.

Researchers looked at UK prescribing data in the six months following the period of public debate.

Among patients deemed at high risk of developing heart disease in the next 10 years there was a 12 per cent higher chance they would stop taking statins.

Patients taking statins for existing heart disease were 11 per cent more likely to stop, according to the study which is published in the BMJ.

It estimates that 219,000 people stopped taking drugs which could lead to more than 2,000 extra heart attacks and strokes over 10 years.

Study author Professor Liam Smeeth from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said: “Coverage of health stories in the mainstream media can have an important, real-world impact on the behaviour of patients and doctors. This may have significant consequences for people's health.”

But Dr Fiona Godlee, editor in chief of The BMJ said it was “absolutely right that there is public debate about the benefits and harms of treatments”