The Daily Telegraph (London)

October 28, 2011 Friday   
Edition 1;   
National Edition

**Families and carers paymost of £34bn bill for** **dementia**  
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**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 18  
  
**LENGTH:** 540 words

THE cost of Alzheimer's disease and dementia has risen to £34billion a year with families and carers paying most of the bill, a study has found.

Britain spends more on dementia than any of the 15 EU members before the 1990s expansion except for Germany, which has a much higher population, a report by Oxford University academics claims.

Health and social care, informal help provided by families and the expense of lost earnings due to illness and early death make dementia much more costly than heart disease and stroke combined, the report said.

An estimated 955,000 people in Britain suffer from dementia, but there is no known treatment that can protect against, halt or reverse its degenerative effect on the brain.

The cost of health and social care alone for each patient in Britain is £13,000 per year, significantly higher than the European average with only Sweden and Luxembourg spending more.

This figure leaves out the significant factor of informal care by families and friends, such as help with household tasks, shopping, transport and supervision, which accounts for £21billion each year - more than half of the total amount.

But it is our reliance on expensive care homes rather than informal arrangements that makes dementia care in Britain so expensive compared with the rest of Europe, experts said.

The annual bill for residential and nursing homes in Britain is estimated at £11billion and hospital inpatient care for dementia costs £1.2billion, which is comfortably more than any other country.

Dr Ramon Luengo-Fernandez, who led the study, said: "In southern Europe daughters take care of mothers or fathers with dementia, whereas in Britain they tend to put them in residential care or nursing homes.

"People [in Britain] become more mobile and live a long way from their parents.

Rather than living in the town or city where they were born, workers tend to live further afield."

A previous study by the same team of researchers in early 2010 estimated that the overall burden of dementia in Britain was much lower, at about £23billion per year.

The latest figures - which relate to 2007 - show the cost is 50 per cent higher, but academics put the increase down to the use of different criteria to produce their estimates.

The research, published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease, showed that the total dementia burden across the 15 European countries was £166billion. Dr Luengo-Fernandez said that this was likely to be an underestimate because, for example, generic medicines not specifi-cally aimed at dementia but taken by many patients were not considered.

Rebecca Wood, the chief executive of Alzheimer's Research UK, said: "Worryingly, these figures are set to increase as the population ages and dementia becomes ever more widespread.

The only answer to dementia is research into treatments and preventions that can reduce its impact, improve individuals' quality of life, or cure the condition."

Scientists have shown for the first time exactly how particular genes affect a protein called amyloid plaque which builds up in the brain and leads to the onset of Alzheimer's.

The US research conducted on yeast, published in the Science journal, could open up new targets for research aimed at tackling the disease.