

IN THE NEWS: AD AND
ANTIPSYCHOTICS

A new UK Government-ordered review on the use of antipsychotic drugs in Alzheimer disease (AD) reports that only 36,000 of the 180,000 patients who receive these therapies experience a benefit from treatments. Furthermore, the review highlights that 1,800 deaths a year in these patients are connected to antipsychotics.

“This long-awaited landmark review is a welcome recognition of the scale of the issue,” says Neil Hunt, Chief Executive of the Alzheimer’s Society (*Guardian*, 12 November 2009). Other parties are less impressed with the timing of the report. “This review comes much too late for thousands of elderly people whose lives have been cut short by the reckless prescribing of antipsychotic drugs,” states UK Member of Parliament Paul Burstow (*Guardian*, 12 November 2009).

The use of antipsychotic drugs has become common in patients with AD. Nevertheless, “they are too often used as a first-line response to behavioral difficulty in dementia rather than as a considered second-line treatment when other nonpharmacological approaches have failed,” explains the review (as quoted in the *Guardian*, 12 November 2009). On the issue of who is to blame for the overuse of antipsychotics, Nadra Ahmed, Chairman of the National Care Homes Association, has no doubt. “These drugs are prescribed by general practitioners, they are not prescribed by the care-home providers,” she says (*Guardian*, 12 November 2009).

Solutions to the problem have been suggested. “Change will only be achieved with commitment from Government, PCTs [Primary Care Trusts] and health professionals—and clear logical targets,” offers Hunt (*Sky News*, 12 November 2009). The UK Government acknowledges the need for change. “We know there are situations where antipsychotic drug use is necessary—we’re not calling for a ban, but we do want to see a significant reduction in use,” states Care Services Minister Phil Hope (*BBC News*, 12 November 2009).

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