

# COVID-19 sees prescriptions increase for dementia drugs linked with serious side-effects

16 March 2021



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New research published in *The Lancet* online finds that not only are dementia deaths up 79% (ONS figures—19th Oct) compared to previous years but the prescription rates of antipsychotic drugs to people with dementia have also increased during COVID-19.

Although the absolute number of antipsychotic [prescriptions](#) for people with dementia decreased, reductions in the overall number of diagnosed dementia patients meant that the proportion of those who have been prescribed antipsychotics substantially increased.

The percentage of those prescribed antipsychotics was relatively stable throughout 2018 and 2019, between 9-28% and 9-47%.

In March 2020, this increased to 9-69% and in April rose to 9-99%, a total of 45,286 people. By July the percentage of those with dementia prescribed antipsychotics was still at 9-74%.

Prof Rob Howard from the University College

London led the research with Prof Alistair Burns, the National Clinical Director for Dementia at the National Health Service England. Rob Howard is a trustee of the UK's leading dementia research charity, Alzheimer's Research UK.

Dr. Rosa Sancho, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said: "Alzheimer's Research UK research has helped establish the risks associated with antipsychotics and although we have made progress in reducing their use, more work is needed. The drugs can have a powerful sedative effect and should only be used for people with dementia where there is no alternative for dealing with challenging behavior.

"There is no record for the specific reasons for antipsychotic prescription. It is possible that some of the increase in prescription is related to delirium management, although worryingly it is also possible that the increase was in response to worsened agitation and psychosis in relation to COVID-19 restrictions.

"It's clear COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting those with dementia. These are not just another set of figures but real people's lives and must act as a wake-up call to government of the need to understand the impact of COVID-19 in people with dementia, and the urgency to find life-changing treatments.

"COVID-19 is an imminent threat to research, and we must see government honor their commitment to double funding for [dementia](#) research."

**More information:** Robert Howard et al. Antipsychotic prescribing to people with dementia during COVID-19, *The Lancet Neurology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/S1474-4422\(20\)30370-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1474-4422(20)30370-7)

Provided by Alzheimer's Research UK

APA citation: COVID-19 sees prescriptions increase for dementia drugs linked with serious side-effects (2021, March 16) retrieved 27 May 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-covid-prescriptions-dementia-drugs-linked.html>

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