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Do more to limit 'chemical cosh' for dementia, GPs told

GPs are still handing out too many 'chemical cosh' drugs to dementia patients which are 'robbing them of their dignity', a minister will warn today.

Care Services Minister Paul Burstow is expected to say that doctors are not doing enough to reduce prescriptions of controversial anti-psychotic medications.

He will say that the drugs are 'like a prison sentence' because they can leave patients heavily sedated, effectively locking them in their own bodies.

Around 180,000 elderly patients with Alzheimer's and similar memory-loss illnesses are taking some form of anti-psychotic medication to control symptoms such as aggression.

The drugs have been dubbed a 'chemical cosh' due to their harmful side-effects and are thought to contribute to the premature deaths of 1,800 patients

By **Sophie Borland** Health Reporter

a year. Last November the Government pledged to reduce the number of prescriptions by two-thirds over the course of the next 12 months, but there are concerns this target has not been met.

In a speech to the National Dementia Congress in Liverpool, Mr Burstow will warn that dementia services 'are not moving anywhere near fast enough'. He will say that the drugs 'are killing people' by increasing the risk of strokes and heart attacks.

There are concerns the drugs are being prescribed simply to sedate patients to make carers' jobs easier. Campaigners, including the Alzheimer's Society charity, claim there are far less harmful treatments available, including music therapy or activities such as crosswords that keep patients alert.

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