

Study reveals depressed elderly risk early death

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In a project involving more than 300 elderly people who had been discharged from hospital, 17% were found to have previously undiagnosed depression and of that figure, 7% died within two years of leaving hospital.

The study also showed that 41% of elderly people who have depression are often later re-admitted to hospital with other illnesses, possibly a result of not receiving appropriate treatment for their depression.

The participants, all aged over 75, were interviewed regularly over a two-year period following discharge from hospital. Factors including physical illness, breathing capacity and social activity were found to impact on the prevalence of depression and consequently the likelihood of re-admission to medical care and early death.

Professor Ken Wilson, from the University's School of Population, Community and Behavioural Sciences, said: "The project has shown that depression is common in older people with physical ill health, recently discharged from medical care. It is often undiagnosed and both patients and doctors confuse it with other illnesses or general signs of ageing. This can have detrimental impact on life expectancy and likelihood of going back into hospital.

"Depression is still a relatively 'new' disease in terms of treatments and services available to sufferers and many older people are still unaware of the symptoms. Often they will visit their doctor presuming they have a

physical illness when they are actually showing signs of depression and will not receive appropriate treatment as a result."

The research team hope that their findings will impact on health care policy with the introduction of a pilot project to identify patients at high risk of depression when they are in hospital. Professor Wilson added: "We hope that future research we have planned will inform new approaches to health care for the elderly with serious illnesses so their chance of survival in the community after leaving hospital is maximised."

Source: University of Liverpool

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