

## ADDICTION FEARS AS 2M TAKE PILLS FOR DEPRESSION



**Fewer people diagnosed with depression and yet more are being prescribed anti-depressants**

Saturday October 24, 2009

**By Allister Hagger**

**TWICE as many anti-depressants are being prescribed now than 11 years ago – although fewer people are being diagnosed with depression.**

A study blames the dramatic increase on doctors giving drugs to the same patients for longer, raising worries about addiction.

Professor Tony Kendrick, of Southampton University, who led the research, said: "We estimate that more than two million people are taking anti-depressants over several years, in particular women aged 18 to 30."

His team looked at UK prescriptions between 1993 and 2004, when the number issued rose from 2.8 to 5.6 per patient.

But new patients diagnosed with depression fell by about a quarter, according to the findings published in the British Medical Journal.

For men, there were 7.83 cases per 1,000 in 1993, compared to 5.97 in 2005. For women the fall was from 15.83 to 10.06.

Prof Kendrick said: "We knew prescriptions have been going up year on year but what this study shows is that people are being kept on these medications for longer, rather than there being more diagnosis of depression.

"We think there are more than two million people in the UK taking anti-depressants on a regular basis.

"Young women are bearing the brunt – not surprising when you consider they are diagnosed with depression twice as often as men.

"They do a lot more looking after children, are more likely to end up as single parents, have to go through pregnancy and childbirth and are often the main carers for elderly relatives.

"They also tend to be paid less. All these factors raise the risk of depression and we GPs often have little alternative but to prescribe anti-depressants."

The increase in prescribing anti-depressants has raised concerns about both their cost and effectiveness.

Prof Kendrick and his team said Prescription Pricing Authority data shows prescribing in England rose 36 per cent between 2000 and 2005.

The researchers said nine in 10 people with depression are taking Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors – a family of drugs which includes Seroxat and Prozac – either continuously or as repeated courses.

Prof Kendrick said: "Research found that, although these drugs are said not to be addictive, many patients find it difficult to come off them. We don't know whether long term use is harmful."

His team analysed all new depression cases between 1993 and 2005 from anonymous computerised records covering 170 GP surgeries and 1.7 million patients.