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GPs giving 'chemical cosh' drugs to patients

with learning disabilities

By **Laura Donnelly**, HEALTH EDITOR

MORE than 30,000 people with learning disabilities and autism are being wrongly prescribed dangerous drugs which act as a "chemical cosh".

Some children were also being put on unsuitable drugs, an audit of GPs' prescribing found. Urgent action has

been promised by health officials after research found that thousands of vulnerable people were being put on medication that can shorten lives.

The national audit of prescribing was ordered after the Winterbourne View scandal, where people with learning disabilities were tortured and forcibly sedated. NHS England said it was

"completely unacceptable" that vulnerable people were being left on the drugs for several years, without proper checks to see if the medication was suitable. Health officials will hold an urgent summit later this week.

Research on the use of antipsychotic drugs for patients with dementia has shown that the medication can increase

the risks of stroke and death. The audit, led by Public Health England, estimates that up to 35,000 adults with a learning disability or autism are being prescribed an antipsychotic, an antidepressant or both without appropriate clinical justification.

The review found that 58 per cent of adults receiving antipsychotics and 32

per cent receiving antidepressants had no relevant diagnosis recorded.

Dan Scorer, head of policy at Mencap, said the findings were "simply outrageous". In a joint statement with Viv Cooper, chief executive at the Challenging Behaviour Foundation, he said that the "widespread culture of chemical restraint" must be addressed.