

Thousands of heart patients 'needlessly' put on beta blockers

By **Laura Donnelly** HEALTH EDITOR

TENS of thousands of Britons are being needlessly put on heart drugs which can cause debilitating side effects, a major study suggests.

Patients who suffer a heart attack are routinely put on beta blockers – medicines that slow the heart and reduce blood pressure.

The powerful drugs can have unwanted side effects for some patients, such as dizziness and tiredness. The medication is necessary when an attack has caused heart failure, meaning the heart muscle is damaged.

But not all heart attacks have such consequences. A new study of almost 180,000 heart attack victims who had not suffered heart failure found that those given beta blockers had no better survival rates than those who were kept off the drugs.

The research, by the University of Leeds, tracked patients on the UK's national heart attack register who were hospitalised with an attack between 2007 and 2013 without suffering heart failure. It examined whether being put on beta blockers made any difference to their chances of being alive one year on.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, found no statistical difference in death rates, within a year of the patients suffering their heart attack, between those who were prescribed beta blockers and those who were not. The findings suggest the drugs are being over-pre-

scribed, burdening patients with side effects and the NHS with unnecessary medicine costs, experts said.

Dr Marlous Hall, lead investigator and senior epidemiologist at the Leeds Institute of Cardiovascular and Metabolic Medicine, said: "If you look at the patients who had a heart attack but not heart failure, there was no difference in survival rates between those who had been prescribed beta blockers and those that had not."

He said further research should be

950,000

The number of people in the UK who have survived a heart attack, according to the British Heart Foundation

carried out to establish how to "personalise" treatment so that it was targeted at those who would benefit from it.

Chris Gale, Professor of Cardiovascular Medicine at the University of Leeds and Consultant Cardiologist at York Teaching Hospital Trust, said: "This study suggests that there may be no mortality advantage associated with the prescription of beta blockers for patients with heart attack and no heart failure."

The British Heart Foundation, which funded the research, says there are around 950,000 people in the UK who have survived a heart attack.