

Millions not told about side-effects of medicine

Fiona MacRae

Millions of Britons are being left in the dark about the side-effects of their antidepressants, sleeping pills and other powerful medicines.

GPs are not providing patients with enough information about possible problems such as loss of libido or even suicidal feelings, a survey by Mind, the mental health charity, found.

Sophie Corlett, Mind's director of external relations, said: "Our research revealed that a worrying number of us are receiving life-changing treatment without fully understanding what it involves. This has got to change."

The warning comes amid concerns that antidepressants are being prescribed as a quick fix. Data obtained by *The Times* last year showed that prescriptions had doubled in a decade, with one in six adults taking Prozac or other antidepressants.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists warned in May that too many patients were stuck on such medications for years, and issued guidance on how to wean people off them safely.

Mind contacted more than 12,000 adults with mental health problems and found that only 20 per cent had had the side-effects of their drugs explained to them. Some 53 per cent said they had not received enough information about how the treatment would help them.

The charity called for GPs to receive more training in mental health as medication, although effective, was not for everyone. "It is critical people are told about potential adverse side-effects, such as suicidal thoughts and self-harm, so they can make informed choices," Mind said.

Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, chairwoman of the Royal College of General Practitioners, said that doctors would always try to discuss side-effects with patients. "General practice is under extreme pressures and the standard ten-minute GP consultation is simply inadequate to properly deliver care to patients with complex health needs," she said. "We need greater investment in general practice so that we can spend more time with our patients."