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People with Down's syndrome 'need help with dementia'

Down's syndrome makes people more vulnerable to dementia, says an expert, but the problem is being ignored

Staff and agencies

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People with Down's syndrome are particularly prone to dementia, an expert said today, and more needs to be done to help them.

Up to half of people in their 50s with Down's syndrome can be affected by dementia, yet campaigners say the problem was barely mentioned in a recent green paper on dementia care in England.

A chemical thought to play a key role in the onset of dementia tends to build up in the brains of people with Down's more quickly than in the rest of the population.

A leading neuroscientist, Professor Tony Holland, who specialises in learning disabilities, said sufferers of the dual condition had effectively been ignored by the government.

"We would like to see it acknowledged at a governmental level, and then clear strategies put in place – which may vary across the country – that ensure they have access to the right services," the Cambridge University professor told the BBC.

The sister of a Down's sufferer who died aged 52 after his memory started failing said she had to fight to get the right treatment.

"I think the levels of care now are becoming much more professional – it's very gradual, some areas are far more progressive than others," Nikke Lewis said. Her brother Andrew started showing symptoms of dementia in his 40s.

The care services minister, Phil Hope, said the green paper set out plans to redesign the care system so that it works better for everyone.

He said: "The green paper is based on making the system fairer, simpler and more affordable for everyone.

"Doing this will benefit people with Down's syndrome as much as any other group."

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Information to help professionals with the implementation of the NDS.

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