

Government warned on drug failures

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A group of clinicians and scientists has written to the Government expressing concerns about the escalating problems of drug failures and adverse drug reactions.

In an open letter to Prime Minister David Cameron and Health Secretary Andrew Lansley, the signatories describe the UK pharmaceutical industry as being in "crisis" and call for a fresh approach to the testing of new medicines.

They claim adverse drug reactions have reached "epidemic proportions" amid rising costs in prescriptions, with around 197,000 EU citizens dying every year because of the problem.

The letter, published in medical journal *The Lancet*, says the reliance of testing new drugs on animals before humans is partly to blame, with trials on non-humans frequently failing to translate to the clinic.

"Our reliance on animals to establish safety results in the exposure of clinical volunteers and patients to many treatments that are at best ineffective and at worst dangerous," they say.

Scientist Tony Dexter, who runs a research lab in Cheshire and is a signatory, told Sky News: "A fundamental problem is that a rat is not a human. They are different sizes, have different metabolisms and have different diets so using animals to predict effects on humans is difficult. Fifty percent of compounds that prove to be safe in rats prove not to be safe in humans so it really is the toss of a coin."

The experts have called for the use of more human-biology-based experiments where chemicals are tested on human cells to see how people might be affected by new treatment.

In the letter, they also say the cost of new medicines is rising "unsustainably, creating an ever-increasing burden on the National Health Service".

Meanwhile, increasingly prevalent diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, many cancers, and stroke, remain without adequate treatments, they add.

"The UK pharmaceutical industry is in crisis," they tell Mr Cameron and Lansley. "Likewise, health care is in a web of crises, many of which are intimately linked to the pharmaceutical industry's major problems."