Al development could help revolutionise research into the diseases causing dementia



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Today (Monday 30 November) researchers have announced that an artificial intelligence (AI) solution pioneered by London-based AI lab, DeepMind is capable of determining the shape of many proteins quickly and at relatively low cost.

Diseases like Alzheimer's involve the build-up of abnormally folded proteins that cause damage to nerve cells in the brain.

The structure of a protein determines how it behaves. Understanding its formation is a key goal of researchers and can help them design drugs that could help the brain get rid of harmful proteins.

Dr Sara Imarisio, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said

"Proteins are essential for living and during the diseases that cause dementia they go awry. Working with proteins, understanding their structure, looking at their effects on behaviour in the brain, and developing drugs to target them goes to the very core of what our scientists do. We still do not have a drug to slow or stop diseases like Alzheimer's but new and powerful technologies able to accelerate progress gives people hope. "As the UK's leading dementia research charity, we are spearheading research initiative using AI to try and revolutionise how we view dementia in the future. We must wait to see the full data before we can understand the true impact of today's announcement. Biology is complex and not only is the shape of a protein important, but the interactions it has with others. We must work to capitalise on the powerful technologies of today, but to do so we need to see investment in research increase. With Alzheimer's Research UK set to lose vital funding because of COVID-19 we need government to honour their commitment to double spending on dementia research to ensure progress is not lost."

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