

## **Parkinson's Disease Patients Make More Driving Errors: Is Hanging up the car keys the Solution?**

*Compiled By Nadine Koogler, November 2008 Issue of "Parkinson News"*

"There are no rules, laws, or regulations that concern driving for people with Parkinson's disease," says neurologist Abraham Lieberman, MD, medical director of the National Parkinson's Foundation and a professor of neurology of the University of Miami School of Medicine. But the latest study on the issue, published in the Dec. 10, 2002 *Neurology*, suggests that perhaps it should. Researchers found a direct link in the likelihood of driving accidents with the disease's progression (Web MD, 2002). "We found it particularly interesting that there was no relationship between Parkinson's patients' self-reporting of moving violations...what was surprising, based on our and previous studies, is that the patients didn't have a good feeling or understanding on how bad their driving really was," says lead researcher Theresa A. Zesiewicz, MD, of the Parkinson's Disease and Movement Disorders Center at the University of South Florida College of Medicine.

A team led by Dr. Veli-Matti Heikkila, of the Merikoski Research and Rehabilitation Centre, in Oulu, Finland, found that it is difficult to evaluate patients' driving ability without psychological testing in combination with a driving test. (CMR Clinical Medicine & Research), July 2003 *Neurologic Conditions: Assessing Medical Fitness to Drive*, Steven H. Yawle, MD, Phiroze Hansotia, MD, Dqen Knapp, OTR, and John Ehrfurth PHD.

"For the general public the issues are safety and risk assessment. Risk assessment is the ability to assess if a patient is able to control a motor vehicle at all times." For this type of assessment to occur, physicians need:

\*Information about the functional capability of the driver, in addition to the medical diagnosis (es),

\*Knowledge of the minimum functional requirements for safe driving,

\*Knowledge and ability to correlate the assessment of the driver's functional level with his risk of crashes as a driver.

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Additional articles will provide some resources for those seeking answers. They include:

1. American Medical Association,  
[www.amaassn.org/ama/pub/category.10791.html](http://www.amaassn.org/ama/pub/category.10791.html)The guide features a questionnaire, Am I a Safe Driver? And Tips for Safe Driving.
2. See a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist who provides on-road tests and rehabilitation based on the results of the on-road tests. This service can be costly, averaging \$200 to \$400 for an assessment and about \$100 an hour for rehabilitation. To find a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist, call ADED at (800) 290-2344 or check the directory at [www.drive-ed.org](http://www.drive-ed.org)
3. AARP 55 ALIVE Driver Safety Program (888) 227-7669
4. AAA Safe Driving for Mature Drivers Program (Contact your local AAA for details.)

5. visit the Department of Motor Vehicles and ask to take a driving test (If you were to fail the test, your license would be revoked.)

6. Find alternate modes of transportation, including taxis, buses, subways and getting a ride from family members

7. Call ElderCare Locator (800) 677-1116 and ask for your local Office on Aging, or visit the website [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).

“It is widely recognized that physicians do not have the proper training to make a legal determination about whether a patient is fit to drive. Driving is a privilege granted by the state, not a right issued by a physician. The current accepted reference standard to determine fitness-to-drive is an on-the road test administered by a qualified driving performance examiner. These tests evaluate driving skills in a controlled environment and thus may not equate to all possible driving conditions. After the occurrence of certain specified medical conditions, testing of driving abilities may be legislatively controlled by some states. For instance, some states require periodic evaluation and retesting after a traumatic brain injury. In other instances, despite their lack of professional training in this area, physicians are asked to make assessments and recommendations to their patients regard to whether they should drive or not based on an existing or incipient medical condition.....neuropsychological and off-road testing should be utilized by physicians to make valid decisions to whether to refer patients to the appropriate legal authority for the on-the-road fitness-to drive evaluation”  
[www.pbmedcentralnih.gov/article render.fcgi?artid=1069044](http://www.pbmedcentralnih.gov/article%20render.fcgi?artid=1069044).