

Addressing Driving Safety in People with Dementia

Jane Call OTR
VA Hospital Madison WI

Disclosure Statement

I have no relevant financial relationships to disclose that exist now or in the past 12 months.

Objectives

- Understand changes with aging that can affect driving skills
- Describe the OT driver safety assessment done at the VA Hospital
- Identify ways medical providers can assist older drivers and their families with decisions about driving safety

Older Driver Statistics

- By 2020 7 million people in the US over 65 have dementia
- By 2030 9 million
- By 2040 12 million
- Estimated 110,000 people in Wisconsin have dementia (2019)
- By 2025 this is projected to be 130,000
- Approximately 30-40% are still driving
- Per Population Reference Bureau Fact Sheet

Age related changes: normal aging

- Vision/eye diseases
- Decreased flexibility and strength
- Slower processing speed
- Slower reaction time
- Medical conditions: diabetes, heart disease, CVA, medications
- Hearing loss
- Drivers may often gradually change or limit their driving with awareness

People with Dementia

- Decreased memory
- Impaired attention
- Decreased motor skills
- Visual spatial/perception deficits
- Impaired judgement
- Changes in behavior, mood, personality
- Impaired orientation/confusion with time and place
- Executive function deficits
- Lack of insight/awareness impairs ability to self regulate

Warning Signs

- Difficulty judging distances
- Gets lost/disoriented in familiar places
- Changes in driving skills: driving too slow/fast, ignores traffic signs
- Accidents, near misses, tickets, warnings
- Parks inappropriately
- Difficulty making turns, especially left turns
- Other drivers honking at them
- Confusion at on/off ramps, 4 way stops, roundabouts

Risk Factors associated with unsafe driving

- At fault accidents or tickets
- Family concerns
- Difficulty with other IADL such as cooking, managing finances and medications
- Impaired scores on psychometric tests (SLUMs, MOCA scores <20)
- Getting lost while driving to usually familiar places
- History of falls

OT off road Driving Assessment

- Chart review: medical history, info from family and caregivers, SW notes, prior cognitive testing results
- Interview with the patient: importance of driving, need to drive, how much, where, types of highways, miles driven per week, any accidents or tickets, getting lost, family support or other transportation options

The OT off road driver safety assessment:

- Cognition: Short Blessed, Clock Draw, Animal Fluency, Trails A&B
- Visual Processing Tests: Symbol Digit Modality Test, Motor Free Visual Processing Test
- Vision: far visual acuity, depth perception, peripheral vision, road signs, color vision, contrast sensitivity (night vision)
- Reaction Time: Dynavision, Foot to Brake reaction time test
- Results are summarized and patient is referred back to the provider who ordered the consult for a discussion of results and recommendations

OT Service Agreement for Off Road Assessment

- Indications are for mild cognitive impairment, mild dementia dx
- May be tested only 1x/yr unless there is documented change in medical condition
- If failed, reassess only if dx indicates potential for neurologic or medical recovery, not a progressive neuro condition such as Alzheimer's

OT Driving Assessment Not Indicated

- If patient failed a previous assessment with no change in condition
- If license has been suspended by another provider
- Visual impairment that doesn't meet DMV guidelines
- Concerns related to road rage, somnolence, legal issues, DUI
- CDL evals

Consensus Statements

- People with moderate to severe dementia should not drive
- People with new diagnosis of mild dementia, mild cognitive impairment should be referred for further testing, especially when risk factors are present
- Mobility counseling should start immediately anticipating that driving cessation will likely occur in the future

Role of Medical Providers

- In clinic assessment: interview pt/family, cognitive screen
- Refer for off road driving assessment with OT
- Recommend repeat driver eval if appropriate (usually yearly)
- Assist families/caregivers with discussion about driving safety
- Counseling patient about driving safety; start conversations early and discuss often (each visit)
- Family may need to take the car, keys to keep patient from driving

Role of Medical Providers

- Make a contract to stop driving early in the diagnosis
- A written "Do not drive" prescription may be helpful
- Involve the patient, family, caregiver, PCP, SW
- Suggest modifications to the driving routine (daylight only, no highway, only (x) miles from home)
- Have short, frequent conversations about driving safety and eventual retirement from driving
- Focus on the nature of the disease
- If the patient refuses to stop driving, the family may need to take the car/keys

Role of Medical Providers

- Send a letter to the DMV (when appropriate)
- Refer to Social Work for assistance with transportation

Transportation Options

- Social Work assistance
- Explore ways to reduce the need to drive
- Private transportation/Uber/Lyft
- Friends and family
- Volunteer driver programs
- Area Agency on Aging
- Arrange for grocery or medication delivery

Final Thoughts

- Autonomy vs Safety
- Be Safe, Not Sorry
- Questions/comments?

Resources

- Wis Dept of Transportation; wisconsin.gov; Medical Review Unit (608)266-2327
- Illinois Sec of State; cyberdriveillinois.com
- Family Caregiver Alliance; Dementia and Driving
- The Hartford; thehartford.com; booklets: We Need to Talk, At the Crossroads (guides for conversations about driving safety)
- National Institute on Aging
- Alzheimer's Assoc (Wis and national); Dementia and Driving resource center website
- AARP Driver Safety Program
- ADRC of Dane County

Resources cont'd

- PubMed.gov; driving and dementia
- VA-TMS catalog; Driving with Dementia
- American Occupational Therapy Assoc (AOTA): www.aota.org/olderdriver
- AAA: Senior Driving Safety, Evaluate Your Driving Abilities
- Administration on Aging
- American Medical Assoc; Physicians Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers
- Dept of Veterans Affairs; Driving and Dementia brochure; va.gov/vhapublications
- VHA Driving Safety for Veterans with Dementia Workgroup Report 12/17

Resources cont'd

- National Highway Transportation Safety Admin; Community Mobility and Dementia, Driving and Alzheimer's Disease Info for Patients
- AlzOnline.net; Driving and Progressive Dementia
- NHTSA.gov
- Medical Professional's Guide for Reporting Drivers to Wis-DMV: www.dot.wiscamin.gov/drivers/medical
- Fitness todrive.com

References

- Family Caregiver Alliance; Fact Sheet: Dementia and Driving
- Wheatley, C.J., Carr, D.B (2014); Consensus Statement's on Driving for persons with Dementia; Occupational Therapy in Health Care; 28:12, 132-139.
- Harney, M., Antwona, Piero (2004); Driving and Dementia: a Physician's Perspective, Marquette Elders Advisors; vol 6: Iss 1, art 6.
- VA-TMS Handout Series: Capacity and Fitness to Drive a Motor Vehicle.
- Dickerson, Anne, Meuel, D., Ridenour, C., Cooper, K., (2014) Assessment Tools Predicting Fitness to Drive in Older Adults: A Systemic Review. AJOT, Nov/Dec, vol 68, number 6.

References cont'd

- Wolfe, P and Lehockey, K (2016) Neuropsychological Assessment of Driving Capacity, Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology July 29,2016.
- Alz.org
- CDC; Older Adult Drivers Factsheet
- O'Connor, M, Kapust, Hollis, A, and Jones, R (2010) The 4C's (Crash History, Family Concerns, Clinical Condition, and Cognitive Functions): A Screening Tool for the Evaluation of the At-Risk Driver. The American Geriatrics Society, vol 58, no 6.
- Ott, Brian and Lori Daiello, How does dementia affect driving in older patients? Aging Health, 2010 Feb 1; 6 (1), 77-85.