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Poster Presentation

Safe Driving and Alzheimer's Disease

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Abstract

People with Alzheimer disease (AD) have decreases in brain cell function that may increase their risks as drivers. The changes in brain cells affect memory (at first, short-term memory and then much later, long-term memory) and other thinking functions. In addition, people with early AD, though often very functional in many areas of life, may not be as competent behind the wheel of a car as those without the memory-damaging disease. Furthermore, many people with AD and their families are not aware how dementia affects a person's driving abilities, often until there has been an incident involving an accident, getting lost while driving or other driving crisis. The need for overall education around this issue is critical. In addition, the declining cognitive abilities of a person with AD will ultimately lead to the need for the individual to stop driving. It is difficult to determine when restrictions are needed because little solid evidence exists linking various stages of dementia with driving behavior. However, at some point in the progression of the disease, driving performance errors will present a safety risk to both the individual and the public. In conclusion, the person with AD should participate in the planning and decision making regarding the cessation of driving. Furthermore, driving demands quick reaction time and fast decision making; because of this, a person with AD will eventually become unable to drive. However, driving privileges must be withheld when the individual poses a serious risk to self or others.

Keywords: Alzheimer's Disease, Memory Dysfunction, Driving, Road Traffic Accident.

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