

Seniors and Driving – Having “The Talk”



Many seniors dread having to give up their driver's licence. They often experience this as having limits placed on their freedom and mobility.

This scenario is one that has played out many times with adult children accompanying their parents to a doctor visit. Many difficult subjects are discussed including whether Mom or Dad should be thinking about moving to a retirement or assisted living residence, or whether they should still be driving.

For seniors, this talk is one of the most difficult because many feel they're beginning to lose their independence and the ability to make their own choices. Often, seniors tell me they are good drivers and have never had an accident. I tell them simply: "I don't want you to have an accident!"

I ask patients if they would be confident enough to drive with a grandchild in the car. If the answer is no, I tell the patient that it sounds as though they may not be same driver as they were in the past and perhaps they might consider whether they truly believe they are as good a driver as they want to be.

When patients complain of failing eyesight or they need cataract surgery, I ask whether they're still driving or when their next driving test is scheduled. This is also a good time to chat about road safety for my patients and the other drivers on the road.

In Ontario, physicians are required by law to report patients who may be medically unfit to drive to the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO). To determine whether a person is fit to drive, there may be a need for a medical exam, blood work, a specialist report or a statement of proof from a driving clinic professional.

It's not surprising to find that a majority of seniors – including those of more advanced ages – travel most often by car; the number of seniors who drive is expected to increase in the coming years. (Visit <http://hnhbhealthline.ca/listServices.aspx?id=10321> for information about transportation options available in your community).

Even when a senior knows deep down that it may be time to give up their driver's licence, they often hang onto to it as a way to preserve their independence. Tension is often created when a family is adamant that their loved one should no longer be driving.

If you're experiencing difficulty broaching the subject, your family doctor or CCAC care coordinator can help you start the conversation. Whether it's time for a driving test or to sit down to have the tough talk about giving up a driver's licence, speaking with your doctor or CCAC care coordinator can help ease family tension.

Click here for MTO's rules for Drivers over 80 <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/driver/senior-driver-licence-renewal-program.shtml>

Click here for MTO's Physician guidelines for reporting medically unfit drivers <http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/medically-unfit-driver-physicians.shtml>