

Fact sheet # 3

Assessing fitness..... to drive

The 2012 regulations

In Queensland in March 2012, new medical standards came into effect for drivers of private and commercial vehicles. The standards are contained in the document *Assessing Fitness to Drive 2012*, which replaces the previous standards (*Assessing Fitness to Drive 2003*).

In reality, older drivers' accident statistics are lower than in the general community. Reasons for this are many but often drivers do not drive so much, tend to drive in their local community and probably do not take the risks associated with younger drivers. However, older drivers are likely to suffer declines in functioning and a number of health problems that may cumulatively affect driving ability.

When involved in motor vehicle accident, elderly people are more likely to be killed or disabled than younger people (1).

Also in Queensland, all Queensland driver licence holders of any age and persons applying for a Queensland driver licence have a legal obligation to notify the department if they have a permanent or long term medical condition, or a change to an existing medical condition that is likely to adversely affect their driving capacity.

Seventy five year olds must obtain a medical certificate if they wish to continue to drive.

A Queensland driver licence holder 75 years of age (this is quite young as it is 80 years in NSW) or older, must only drive

while carrying, and driving in accordance with a current Medical Certificate for Motor Vehicle Driver form (F3712). This is mandatory regardless of whether or not he/she has a medical condition.

The risk of a driving licence being withdrawn can invoke strong emotions in an older driver as Australians rely on their car for a quality of living. So the loss of the ability to be independently mobile can be devastating especially for men who may be the primary driver in a marriage.

If the GP or specialist doctor has recommended conditions for an older person when driving, the medical certificate must state those conditions and drivers must abide by these conditions when driving. How long a medical certificate lasts depends on whether an older driver has medical condition, and how often that condition requires monitoring.

Doctors can refer their older patients to a Physiotherapist, an Occupational Therapist, and/or an Optometrist for assessment and advice about any conditions to be considered by the doctor when issuing the medical certificate.

This is a decision that only a medical practitioner can make. They try to find a balance between the risk to the patient and other users and driver rights, when assessing the fitness of elderly patients to drive.

So it is important that older Queenslanders have a good relationship with their GP's and ensure that they have appropriate check-ups and

screening well before they turn seventy-five years.

Patients cannot expect that when they turn seventy-five they can obtain a medical certificate from a doctor whom they have never seen or know anything about.

Medical Certificate currency

A medical certificate may be issued for a few months or for up to five years.

An older driver still can be eligible to apply for a driver licence that lasts for up to five years, regardless of how long the medical certificate is issued. However, drivers must ensure they only drive while carrying and in accordance with a current medical certificate.

Fines apply for driving without holding a current medical certificate and driving outside the conditions of a licence. *More information: Queensland Government Transport & Main Roads website.*

Happy and safe driving!

References

Kamenoff I, Dr Assessing elderly people to drive: Practical considerations, Australian Family Physician RACGP, Vol 37 (9).