Dementia and the impact of not driving

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Driving is a powerful symbol of competence and independence.
Definition of dementia

“the gradual deterioration of functioning, such as thinking, concentration, memory, and judgment, which affects a person’s ability to perform normal daily activities.”

(Mayo Clinic, 2012)
Dementia and driving: A risky business
Driving demands:

• Focused concentration
• Quick reaction times
• Good judgement
• Efficient problem solving
• Driving affects others; the safety of self and others must be imperative
• Alertness and perception
Driver’s vs pilot’s license

• 3 assessments from aged 16
• No further assessments until aged 70
• Then only health check by gp – no practical or written re-assessment

• Bi-annual flight review and test - practical and written
• Full medical examinations, which escalate after age 40
• Additional requirements if not flown for 3 months or flying with passengers
Full assessment aged 50

• Neurologist thought I would probably pass
• Neuropsychologist thought I would probably pass
• I thought I would pass

Score: 35%

FAILED
The impact of not driving

- Loss and grief – feels like a death
- Loss of independence
- Loss of control
- Loss of independent ‘mobility’
- Loss of privacy
- Social inequality
- Increased stigma
- Increased isolation
- Loneliness
- Guilt and feeling like a burden
- Feeling ‘needy’
- Unable to be self-sufficient
- Tension and anxiety relying on others
- Reduced family income - loss of work hours to provide transport
- Buses and taxis can be too difficult for PWD to negotiate
- Sense of well being impaired
When not to drive?

• If you under the influence of alcohol
• When under the influence of mind altering prescription or illicit drugs
Requirements (Australia)

• Current legislation says dementia is not sufficient reason for the revoking of a person’s driver’s license, but relies on;
  – Driving behaviour
  – Capacity to drive safely
  – Self monitoring/reporting (honestly)
  – Beliefs about capacity
  – Physical functioning and vision
  – Cognition
A human right to drive?

No; it is not our right to drive vs the rights and safety of others.

People with dementia still have a 100% responsibility to regard road safety, and if we lose the insight for this, then others should and must step in. If we have been clinically diagnosed with dementia, then at least two markers of safe driving have been impacted.
This is a major societal challenge

- There are limited resources
- The variances in laws and the ways in which people with dementia are tested is unsafe
- The cost of assessing fitness to drive is high, and borne entirely by the PWD
- Variations in states make it unsafe, as drivers are not limited by borders
- Road safety is rarely first consideration
Thank you

http://kateswaffer.com
References


