

Aging Wisely™

Comprehensive Care Management and Consultation

Taking Away the Keys: Don't Wait for the Police to Call **What to do when your loved one may not be able to drive anymore**

Statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration show that senior drivers are the only age group in recent years to experience an increase in road fatalities. Although seniors as a group are generally safe drivers, factors such as physical changes, illness, medication, and cognitive impairment may significantly impair a driver. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death for 65-74 year olds and crash rates for cognitively impaired/dementia drivers are 7.6 times higher than normal.

Many times as family members, we know that Mom or Dad may be declining, but we don't know how or when to tackle this difficult issue and we may get a lot of resistance when we do. Here are a few pointers and resources when faced with this issue:

- ✓ Do not assume your loved one is safe driving because he/she “only drives locally and follows the same routine”. If he/she suffers memory loss, this can change in an instant. Many accidents happen close to home.
- ✓ Get a professional opinion. Seek a driver evaluation for questionable cases (check your local Area Agency on Aging, hospitals, or ask a *geriatric care manager*). AARP offers safe driving program for seniors and driving programs may offer “driving rehab” or programs that help drivers compensate for certain physical losses, as well as suggest adaptive equipment or modifications.
- ✓ Enlist the help of a trusted professional to talk to your parent (clergy, doctor, *care manager*, attorney). Knowing your loved one's values and personality may help tailor the approach. Are they very law abiding and respectful of authority? Is Dad conservative and wouldn't want to risk harming someone? (Remember, personality changes can occur with dementia, so normal approaches and logic may not work.)
- ✓ Make an anonymous report to your DMV. In Florida, call 850-488-8982 or visit www.hsmv.state.fl.us to request form #72190. See also www.floridagrandeddriver.com.
- ✓ Know that, particularly with dementia, you may need to take additional steps such as selling or disabling the car or removing keys. Don't expect your loved one to remember that they are not supposed to be driving if they have memory loss.
- ✓ Prepare ahead of time, by exploring transportation options for your loved one. Loved ones may want to hire a companion a few hours/week to drive to appointments, errands, and have the freedom to get out of the house. Public transportation, nonprofits, and local agencies may offer rides for seniors, sometimes with eligibility requirements or only for specific trips such as medical appointments. Aging Wisely (www.agingwisely.com) can provide assessments & resources. For Pinellas County Senior Transportation, contact EasyLiving, Inc. at 727-448-0900 (www.easylivingfl.com).
- ✓ Help your loved one adjust. Explain and simplify transportation options (i.e. setting up an account with a taxi company to enable billing so cash exchanges aren't required, noting phone #s and rules for transportation services by the phone, going along with your loved one on the route to make sure they can use the service and feel comfortable).