



DriveABLE: new clinical tool measures driving competency

Saint Elizabeth Health Care



A new clinical tool that determines how competent medically impaired patients are to drive has been introduced nation-wide by Saint Elizabeth Health Care, a not-for-profit home care service founded in 1908 that helps seniors live independently. Known as the DriveABLE competence screen and created in Canada, the test operates like a video game and is designed to assess the judgment and reflexes of drivers who might be impaired by their medical conditions or medications. DriveABLE is more sophisticated than practical road tests that measure only basic driving skills, which are often the last skills to deteriorate.

DriveABLE is ideal for physicians because it settles the sensitive question of driving competence in a way that respects their relationship with patients. Instead of having to pass judgment on driving ability themselves, physicians can now rely on a neutral, research-based third party.

DriveABLE was developed after years of research that studied hundreds of medically at-risk and healthy drivers. The work was conducted by Dr Allen Dobbs, former Director of the University of Alberta's Centre for Gerontology. Dr Dobbs was a Professor in the Department of Psychology (Faculty of Science) for 28 years, a member of the Division of Neuroscience, and Adjunct Professor of Medicine at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He is now a Professor Emeritus and the developer, President, and Chief Executive Officer of the DriveABLE companies.

The work undertaken by Dr Dobbs and his colleagues in psychology and medicine identified driving errors most commonly made by medically at-risk drivers as well as the test conditions that most reliably reveal those errors. Criteria for failure were set by empiric evidence to allow healthy, average drivers to pass the test.



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The screen consists of a series of computer exercises that test reflexes, judgment, decision-making, attention, and memory, as well as integration of, or shift among, these abilities. The competence screen identifies the most dangerous drivers without a road test. Computer skills are not necessary because clients merely touch the screen or push a button to complete the tests.

About one third of DriveABLE clients pass the tests, one third fail, and one third have indeterminate results. When results are indeterminate, clients are evaluated using a DriveABLE road test, often on the same day. The pass-fail ratio for the road test is about 50:50. More than 1500 clients have used DriveABLE since it was introduced last year.

The computer test costs \$250 and is considered a medical expense for income tax purposes. The road test is an additional \$75 and is also tax-deductible. Clients can be referred by licensing authorities, physicians, insurance companies, and individuals.

The 40-minute test is now available at six centres in Canada: Toronto, Ont; Montreal, Que; Lethbridge, Alta; Calgary, Alta; Edmonton, Alta; and Vancouver, BC. More centres are planned. Access in most cases is through a health professional.

The need for the DriveABLE test is expected to increase as the number of older Canadians continues to increase. Provincial research shows that the driving population has been aging during the past decade: people older than 80 have been the fastest growing age group among drivers since 1988. Old age per se does not reduce driving skills, but older people tend to have more of the medical conditions and treatments that affect competence.

To contact a DriveABLE centre, call Montreal (514) 733-1414; Toronto (416) 498-3805, extension 2266 or 2295; Lethbridge (403) 317-1463; Calgary (403) 252-2243; Edmonton (780) 433-1494; or Vancouver (604) 921-3355. ♣

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