

have a personal or family history of venous thromboembolism. A workup for occult cancer would depend on associated clinical features, such as a change in bowel habits in elderly patients, which might suggest a tumour site, or the presence of risk factors, such as heavy smoking.

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Testing seniors' driving ability

While driving to the office, I regularly saw an old black sedan that seemed to be holding up the traffic, with cars honking and passing the slower vehicle. An older man was always at the wheel, leaning forward, peering out through the windshield and driving the speed limit. He was the object of frustration on the part of other commuters but, as I found out, he generally rolled up to the lights at the same time I did. This made me more aware of older drivers and their abilities to perform.

In assessing fitness to drive, insurance companies always had an aggravating question about

older people: did I think that the applicant was a safe driver? After an examination of eyesight, a general appraisal, a Mini-Mental State Examination, and questions regarding rules of the road, I was still not sure whether I wanted to meet this guy on the highway.

The only sure way to assess a patients' driving skills was to drive with him or her. My office was in a busy area of town, and if the driver were to pass the test, this was the place to do it. Did he look in his mirror before pulling into traffic? Did she signal before changing lanes or turning? Did he stay on his side of the traffic lines or were they only a general guide? Did she keep up with the traffic or leave it behind?

Drivers ranged from an impeccably dressed man of 77 in a red Audi to a tiny lady who needed many pillows to allow her to see through the steering wheel. Most did a fine job.

Once I had a demonstration of the senior's driving ability, I felt that I could complete the insurance company's letter.

Some flunked the test. One failed candidate continued to drive by my office without a licence, despite the family's confiscating his car keys. He had anticipated trouble and had another set made when he heard that his licence was to be revoked. He soon drove his sedan into the side of a car wash by stepping on the accelerator instead of the brake, and could not buy another vehicle.

This may not be a method for other doctors, but I thought that

I knew how well a person was able to drive after a few blocks in the car with him or her. And all because of an elderly man who drove the speed limit and got downtown at the same time as the speeders.

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