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Themes: Long Term Conditions, Older people

Keywords: Dementia, cognitive assessment, driving, implementation

Applications invited all year round

Self funded students only

Project title: Cognitive screening for ‘fitness to drive’ in dementia; understanding implementation barriers.

Driving is a key factor in outdoor mobility and independence among older people and contributes to the person’s social identity. People who drive have greater opportunities to socialise, pursue leisure interests and participate in society. Stopping driving results in social isolation and depression (1) and increased dependence on external support, all of which have economic implications for both the individual’s themselves and society. As the population ages, the number of old and very old people who drive and consequently drivers with dementia will increase. Increased driving trends and estimated growth in the number of drivers, particularly women, suggest that by 2026 there may be as many as 300,000 drivers with dementia on UK roads (2). Accidents are also more likely to result in serious injury or death because of frailty.

In the UK, the DVLA are ultimately responsible for decisions concerning driving fitness but the role of identifying drivers with dementia has fallen on the healthcare system (3) placing clinicians in a position that can threaten the therapeutic relationship. As a result, discussions about driving, which should form part of any comprehensive assessment do not routinely occur in clinical practice (4).

In an attempt to preserve mobility and independence for as long as possible after onset, clinicians have sought to identify the point in a person’s cognitive decline at which they become unsafe to drive and methods to determine a person’s ‘fitness to drive’ (5). Lincoln et al. (6) developed a cognitive test battery, the Dementia Drivers’ Screening Assessment which reliably predicts safety to drive in people with dementia, (7) and can be used to identify those needing an on-road assessment at a specialist driving assessment centre. However, tests such as the DDSA are not routinely used in clinical decisions regarding fitness to drive. The purpose of this study is to explore the implementation barriers to the use of evidence based cognitive screening and to understand why assessment procedures for drivers with dementia are poorly implemented in clinical practice.

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