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Persuading an elderly relative to stop driving

Many families are faced with the task of persuading an elderly relative to stop driving. Although simply being older does not necessarily make for an incompetent driver, often families see the results of an elderly person who is showing signs of being an unsafe driver and are concerned that that the relative will injure himself or someone else. A recent article in *The Columbus Dispatch* (www.dispatch.com/content/stories/life_and_entertainment/2014/11/15/1-guide-to-life-elderly-drivers.html) by Joe Blundo speaks to the issue of what to do when someone needs to stop driving.

Some examples in the article indicate how difficult it is to persuade an elderly person to stop driving even if it is clear to others that is what should be done. Paula Taliaferro, education consultant for the Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging says that those with cognitive impairments often lack insight to recognize the danger in their driving. Instead any attempt to make them stop is seen as a threat to their independence. She further states that "People grieve the loss of driving privileges; it's about freedom."

According to the article, what does not generally work is the "do-it-yourself" approach such as hiding the keys, disabling the vehicle, or other ways the family tries to have the elder stop driving. One step is to have the conversation. Discuss what is alarming you, such as dents in the car, excessive mileage changes (usually means the elder is getting lost), failing to obey traffic signals such as stop signs, or inability to find familiar locations. Pride gets in the way, and if there is a way for an older driver to save face, such methods may be more effective. For instance, suggest giving the car to a grandchild for college transportation. Remember to address the loss of ability to get around to necessary places, such as doctor appointments, the grocery store and social activities.

A third party intervening is listed as the most effective method of convincing an elderly person to stop driving per the article. There are courses that evaluate a driver's current abilities. AAA has older driver courses available. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation randomly selects drivers over the age of 45 years to re-evaluate and perhaps re-test but there is no systematic testing for drivers who are considered elderly. A physician or family member can report their concerns about an older driver to PENNDOT but many physicians are reluctant to take that step. Without buy-in from the elder, driving without a license is likely to occur even if their license is legally revoked.

Just Drive PA (www.justdrivepa.org) is a website with helpful information for Pennsylvanians and their families. Merely telling someone that they can no longer drive, especially seniors who live outside of cities, is ineffective. Taking the car might solve the immediate problem of keeping the senior off the road, but without alternative transportation, the senior will become homebound.

Often times a third party is better equipped to give the bad news, and convince the elder to give up the keys. However, be prepared for grieving and anger even if the elder agrees to the change. Enlist any assistance you can, and be prepared with the facts, not just accusations. Some older persons are still capable drivers but monitoring should continue to be sure nothing is changing. Other drivers and pedestrians are counting on us not to ignore older drivers who continue to drive when they should not.