

Assessing fitness to drive in older patients: the GP's dilemma



(Institute of Driver Health)

The dilemma:



(Ibrahim, J., et. al. 2013)

Learning Outcomes

- Utilise the updated 2022 Assess Fitness to Drive Austroads guidelines whenever driving fitness needs consideration
- Appropriately triage patients with mild to moderate cognitive impairment in regard to their driving fitness, using simple screening tools
- Conduct difficult discussions around driving fitness with older patients, explaining the legal and moral responsibilities of medical practitioners around assessing fitness to drive, the impact of medical conditions on safe driving with patients and recognising the impact that the driving restrictions will have on patients' lifestyles

Student study bursary

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University of Wollongong Driving Project

- Erin McKernan, year 2 medical student
- **Method:** Semi-structured interviews with a sample of ten GPs were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed.
- **Results:** The key themes that emerged were:
 - challenges GPs face with the current process;
 - techniques used to overcome challenges;
 - the negotiation process.
- Ethics approval was granted by the University of Wollongong Ethics Committee, approval number
- 79 2019/ETH03735.

Challenges GPs face

- *Context of assessment:*

GP3: 'He was a professional driver all his life, and he could be 50% worse than what he was and still be better than the average person'

GP3: 'If a trans-vasc [sic] gives you a 10% chance of stroke per year but you're only driving 15 minutes twice a week, then are you okay to drive?'

- *Assessment limitations:*

GP6: 'A lot of driving is coordinating complex tasks, which is hard with the discrete office-based tools we have to get a quick sense of in the room'

- *New patient assessments*

GP10: 'If it was a new patient coming in for the first time wanting a driver's assessment, you'd be suspicious they they've sought you out because their previous doctor has knocked them back'

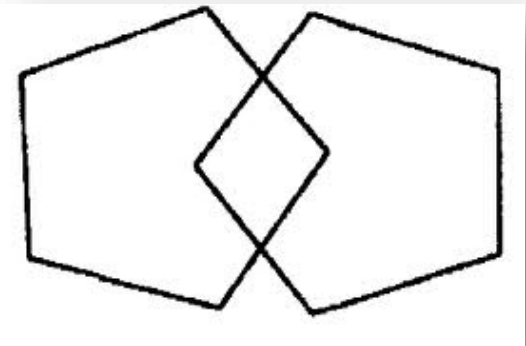
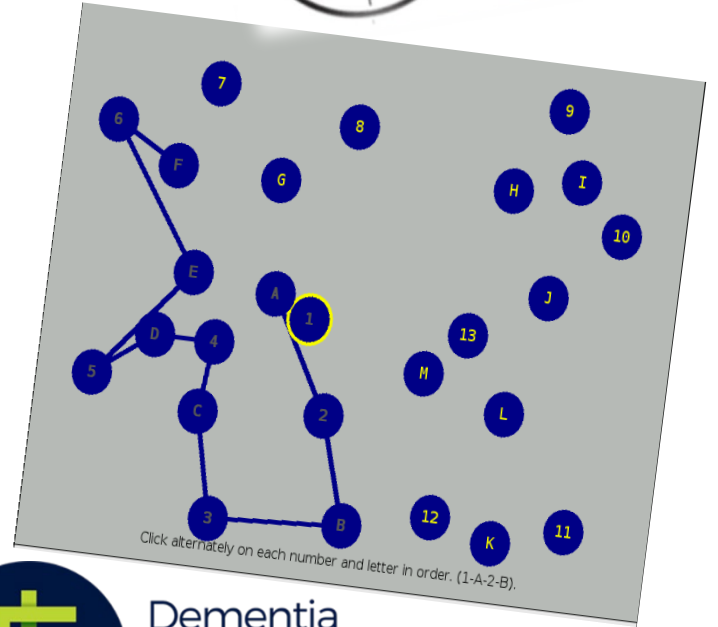
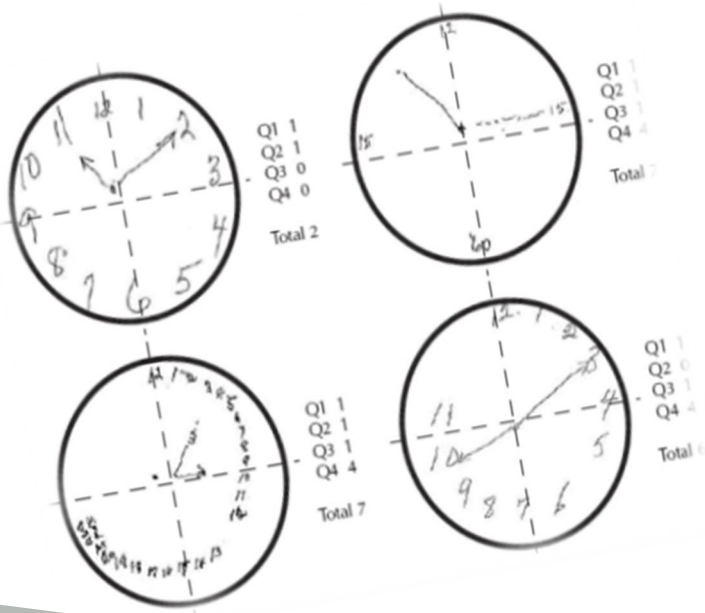
Challenges

- ***Social and emotional implications***

GP3: '[My biggest concern is] the balance of impacts – so community safety versus the impact on the patient but really the impact on the patient is much lesser consideration

GP2: 'You completely wreck their social life and then that's bad for their health as well'

GP2: 'The tricky ones are the fellows who driving has been a really important part of their life and it feels like an affront to say they shouldn't'



Techniques used to overcome challenges

- *Family involvement*

GP6: 'To keep talking with the family about how they're able to support people in that transition would be the most important thing'

- *Multidisciplinary involvement*

GP4: 'I think hearing it from another professional person helps people. So, they hear it from the nurse, they hear it from the geriatrician, they hear it from their GP.'

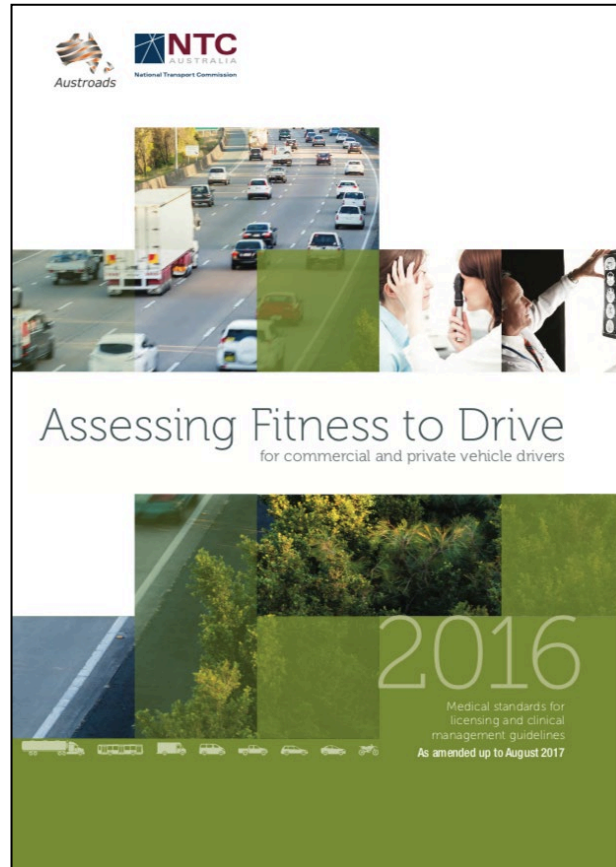
GP3: 'We quite willingly very much involve the driving assessment OTs as well because often, it comes down to a sort of a functional assessment where the person is unknown to the patient and thus doesn't have those biases'

- *Using the Guidelines*

GP2: 'Even though they're unbearably long, if you were searching for a particular thing, they're actually quite helpful'

Austroads Medical Guidelines

- Enshrined in state legislation



A person is **not** fit to hold an **unconditional licence**:

- If the person has a diagnosis of dementia.

A **conditional licence** may be considered by the driver licensing authority subject to at least **annual review**, taking into account:

- the nature of the driving task
- Information provided by the **treating doctor** regarding the level of impairment of any of the following: visuospatial perception, insight, judgement, attention, reaction time or memory and the likely impact on driving ability
- the results of a practical driver assessment if required (refer to Part A section [4.9 Practical driver assessments](#)).

The opinion of an appropriate specialist may also be considered.

(<https://austroads.com.au/publications/assessing-fitness-to-drive/ap-g56>)

The negotiation process

- *Coming to a compromise*

GP5: 'Sometimes it's a process of negotiation. Like organising an occupational therapy driving assessment and saying to the patient "Look, I'm happy to certify you but only if you undergo this assessment"

- *Licence restrictions*

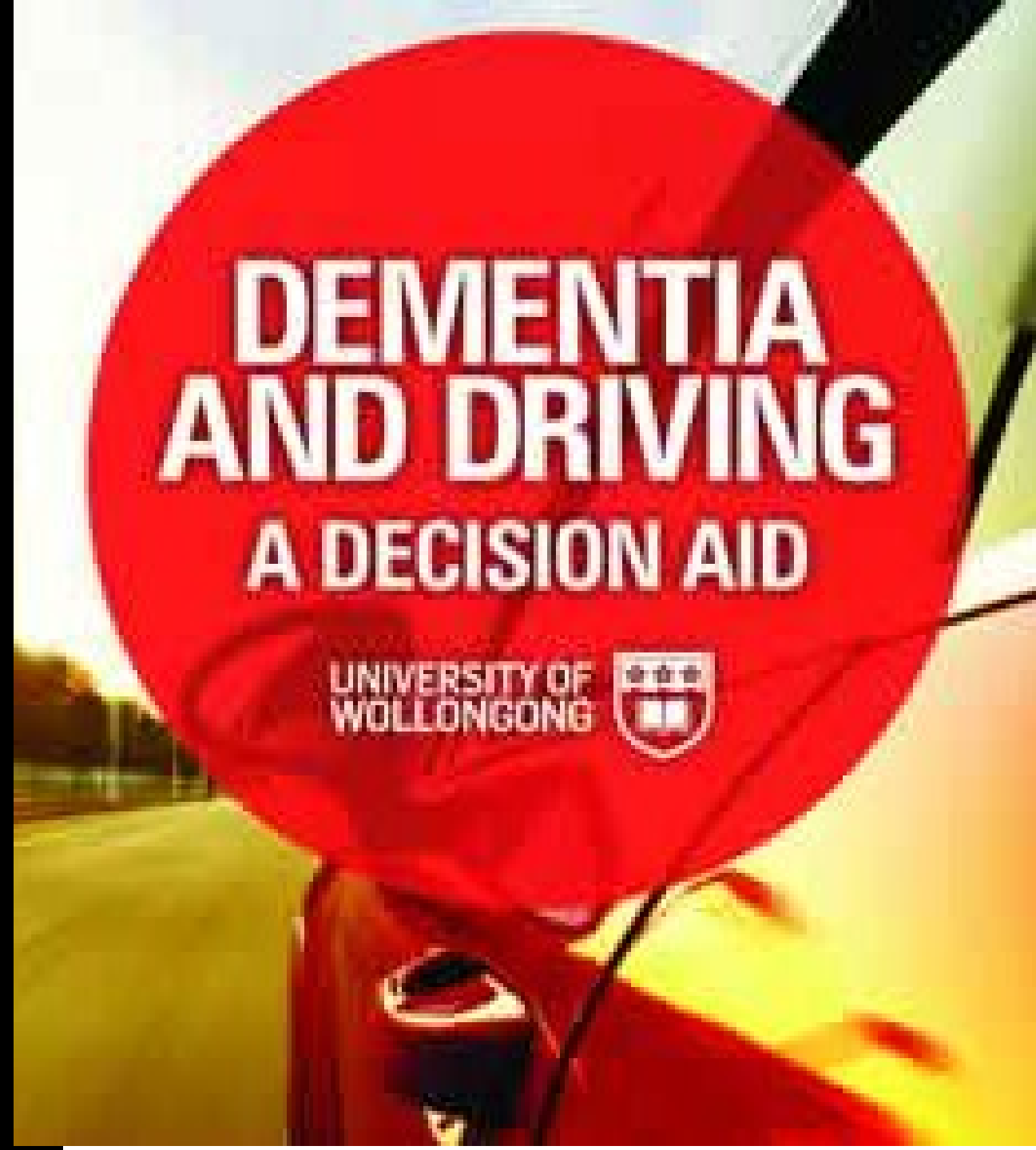
GP10: 'They'll agree to a 10km limit because they look at where they need to go and say "Well, it doesn't really affect my life, I can get to the shops, I can get to the bank"'

Communication tips

- GP3 *'I do the put-yourself-in-their-shoes argument, you know "If you were a mother with a child in the streets"'*
- GP5 *'I use some statistical information like the risks inferred by being 75 and older which is much more than other road users in terms of accident risk per unit time'*
- GP5 *'Sometimes I use other strategies like the cost of holding a licence and maintaining a car can be quite expensive and they can use that money to fund other forms of transport'*
- GP9 *'We just explain why this is an important assessment. It's not just about your safety, it's about the other people on the road'*

Wollongong project on
driving cessation

<http://www.adhere.org.au/dementia-and-driving-2/>



Publication

- Erin McKernan, Su Yin Denise Chia, Victoria Traynor, Nadine Veerhuis, Karen McNeil, Dimity Pond. [Driving assessments for older adult patients: interviews with GPs to gauge current strategies and future directions. Australian Journal of General Practice 2022 \(in press\)](#)



**More
solutions
needed!**



**Dementia
Training
Australia**

Other resources on driving

- **VicRoads** - Self-reporting of dementia diagnosis, explanations of conditional licences and medical review
Dementia and Driving
www.racv.com.au - www.racv.com.au/royalauto/moving/news-information/fitness-to-drive-research.html
- **Dementia Australia** – **Dementia and Driving** - All states and Territories
<https://www.dementia.org.au/resources/health-professionals>
- **Austroads** - **Assessing Fitness to Drive**, a joint publication of Austroads and the National Transport Commission (NTC), details the medical standards for driver licensing for use by health professionals and driver licensing authorities
<https://austroads.com.au/drivers-and-vehicles/assessing-fitness-to-drive>

Thank you