



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A 'touching' test drive from Saint Elizabeth Health Care

Toronto, ON – For many people, being able to drive is critical to maintaining an independent lifestyle. Imagine, then, the sense of loss when individuals are deemed medically unfit to hold a driver's license in Ontario.

Each year, up to 10,000 people in the province have their licenses suspended for medical reasons. Most are referred by physicians who, by law, must report them to the Ministry of Transportation. Those who lose their licenses in this way are most often the elderly, but this group also includes people with debilitating illnesses and those on certain medications.

"The problem with this system, of course, is that it relies on the best judgment of physicians. It is based on expert opinion, but opinion nonetheless and thus begs the question of fairness. As well, there is no assurance of a consistent standard being applied across the province," says Deb LeBlanc of Saint Elizabeth Health Care.

In response, Saint Elizabeth Health Care has introduced a new computerized test that takes human error and subjective opinion out of the equation. The DriveABLE driving competence screen was developed by Dr. Allen Dobbs, former director of the University of Alberta's Centre for Gerontology.

"The DriveABLE screen is a research-based method of fairly and objectively assessing a driver's competence," says LeBlanc. "Unlike existing tests, it focuses on ability and judgment, not basic driving skills."

The test is already in use in Alberta, Quebec and British Columbia. As a measure of its acceptance, DriveABLE has been chosen by the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration as the evaluation component of a larger program examining drivers with medical conditions.

A DriveABLE assessment takes about 40 minutes and involves touching a computer screen or pressing a button to complete a series of tasks. To succeed, a driver must demonstrate memory, judgment, decision-making, attention and motor speed abilities and be able to shift or integrate these skills.

Automated scoring determines the driver's capabilities. If the score is inconclusive, a standardized road test is given to determine competence.

Clients in the Greater Toronto Area can now be referred to Saint Elizabeth Health Care by licensing authorities, physicians, insurance companies and individuals. DriveABLE is ideal for physicians because it settles the question of driving competence in a way that respects their relationship with patients.

The need for such a test is expected to grow as the number of older Canadians continues to increase. Provincial research shows that people over 80 have been the fastest growing age group among drivers for the past decade.

Old age per se does not reduce driving skills. But older people tend to have more of the medical conditions that affect driving competence.

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They also have much higher collision rates than middle-aged drivers, based on the amount of driving. Car crashes are the second-leading cause of injury among seniors and the leading cause of injury-related deaths.

DriveABLE has been endorsed by the Ontario Gerontology Association. The new program is a natural addition for Saint Elizabeth Health Care, which is known for innovative service delivery and the introduction of new home health care programs.

Founded in 1908, Saint Elizabeth Health Care has been a leader in the provision of services that support the independence of seniors and people with disabilities. Working out of centres across Ontario, Saint Elizabeth Health Care nurses, personal/home support workers and rehabilitation therapists conduct more than two million client visits per year.

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