

DRAFT

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT'S HONORARY MEDICAL ADVISORY PANEL ON DRIVING AND PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS

HELD ON MONDAY, 22 SEPTEMBER 2014

Present:

Professor D Cunningham-Owens Chairman
Professor G Lewis
Dr G Jones
Dr P J Connelly

Lay members:

Mr B Alexander

Ex-officio:

Dr R Loane	National Programme Office for Traffic Medicine, Dublin
Mr W Parry	Senior Medical Adviser, DVLA
Dr A White	Medical Adviser, Panel Secretary, DVLA
Dr P Prasad	Medical Adviser, DVLA
Dr A Brown	Medical Adviser, DVLA
Mrs P Merchant	Business Change and Support, DVLA
Mrs J Leach	Medical Licensing Policy, DVLA

1. Introduction and Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Professor S Banerjee, Dr T Beanland, Dr T Jagathesan and from Northern Ireland.

2. Matters arising from the minutes of the Chairmen's meeting held on 19 June 2014.

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Historically the Chairmen's meeting has been traditionally held in the winter months however over the past 3 years the date of the meeting moved progressively into the summer months. The Chairman of the Panel indicated that regrettably this later date has resulted in clashes with pre existing meetings and that attendance had been impossible. A request was therefore made to the members of the Panel for a deputy to attend to allow representation. Details would be circulated for expressions of interest.

The Panel were apprised of the progress of the proposed drug-driving legislation. It was understood that this was likely to become law in March 2015. It was noted with some regret that the Advisory Panel had not been involved in the discussion around this legislation. Further discussion also took place around the proposed changes to drink driving legislation and noted there was not to be a change in the alcohol level applicable to England and Wales. The Panel was also informed about the proposed changes to the right to request an evidential blood sample following a drink drive arrest.

At previous Panel meetings concerns were raised about Continuous Professional Development opportunities around medical conditions and driving. The Panel was informed that since the appointment of Mr Parry as Senior Medical Adviser this situation has been satisfactorily resolved. Discussion took place about appropriate outreach and educational opportunities with the various Deaneries and Royal Colleges. It was felt that this would be a positive step and be welcomed particularly in the area of mental health.

The Panel was informed about the various medical awareness campaigns that have been run by DVLA. The current campaign was tasked with raising the profile of epilepsy and driving, previous campaigns have focussed on visual problems, diabetes and raising the profile of the At a Glance Guide to Medical Standards. It was felt that the awareness of these awareness campaigns was rather limited and suggestions were made for liaising with various Royal Colleges and professional bodies to ensure effective dissemination of information. Panel was informed that currently information is provided on the GOV.UK website, Twitter, FaceBook and various other social media. It was felt that this was maybe somewhat limiting to health professionals who may not be heavily engaged with such media.

The Panel were informed about proposed changes to legislation that would allow extended period licensing; it is likely that this legislation will be enacted at the end of the year, possibly by January 2015. This legislation would allow all licences to be issued for a longer duration possibly up to 10 years. The Panel discussed the potential application of this in the mental health field. It was felt that its use would be limited as most conditions will require either a short period of review or would allow a much longer period until 70 licensing.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 17 March 2014

The minutes were accepted as a true record of the proceedings and duly signed by the Chairman.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

At the previous meeting in March 2014 Dr White from DVLA gave a brief presentation on the various areas of concern to DVLA. Further discussion took place around these areas in particular those of complex neuro-psychiatric conditions and Learning Disabilities. The Panel was reassured of the nature of the investigative process and that a functional rather than diagnostic view point was taken with the presumption of an applicant or driver being allowed to demonstrate their ability. This was in line with the Department's agenda of increasing inclusivity and mobility. The Panel was informed of the difficulties that can arise from the confusion between the areas of Learning Disability, Learning Difficulty and the associated Special Educational Needs. This has resulted in some inappropriate labelling in the past. Simple Learning Difficulties, for example dyslexia, would not normally be of concern to the Agency. The Agency's main concern would be with that population who in previous years would be labelled as having a 'mental handicap'.

The Panel requested clarification of the issue of driving whilst detained under a compulsory section of the mental health legislation. It was felt that the advice on standards should be that driving and licensing should not be permitted whilst subject to an order for compulsory admission and treatment. It was felt that the original wording would preclude licensing for those people detained under a very short lived emergency detention or assessment order

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which would not be appropriate. In effect this would apply to the longer term compulsory admission orders for example Section 3, Section 37/41, Section 47/49 and their equivalents under other legislation.

Clarification was given around driving whilst on leave from hospital. In general it would not be appropriate to drive whilst on section 17 leave from hospital whilst under a compulsory treatment order, but approval may be granted for those on community based orders. The general principle remains, that licensing can be permitted when good stable mental health has been maintained for the requisite time without the compulsory elements of detention under mental health legislation.

An update was given on the ongoing Panel recruitment process.

5. Assessment tools and rating scales used in dementia

A presentation was given to the Panel by Dr White of DVLA. This looked at the performance of drivers referred for onward driving assessments at a Forum centre and their corresponding Rookwood Driving Battery scale results. This was an informal study looking at approximately 40 drivers over a year period and looked at results in a normal case handling situation rather than a controlled trial situation. The results as expected were inconclusive and reinforced the Panel's previously expressed opinion that driving assessments and rating scales should form only one part of the overall assessment process. The Panel expressed its thanks to those involved in collecting the data especially Dr Harrison, Dr Prasad and particularly Dr Morgan. There was a brief discussion on the potential use of simulators in driving assessment process however due to fiscal constraints it was felt this was unlikely to be a viable proposition.

Further information was given to the Panel regarding the investigative process; of the means by which an on road assessment could be accessed and the formal and informal appeal process in the event of revocation of a driving licence.

A wide ranging and informative discussion took place afterwards however no major changes to case processing or medical standards were recommended.

6. Medical standards for Group 2 licensing

Across DVLA medical standards there has been a gradual reduction in the observation periods required for both Group 1 and Group 2 driving; this was in line with the Department's ethos of increased inclusivity and mobility. This has been reflected in the reduction in the observation period required for isolated seizures; the licensing of Group 2 drivers who use Insulin to treat their diabetes and the decreased times required with certain intracranial tumours.

At the present time the Group 2 medical standards applicable to serious mental health issues for example bipolar disorder, hypomania, and psychotic disorders require a 3 year period of good stable mental health before licensing can be considered. It was felt that it was appropriate to re-visit this extended observation period in view of the potential impact on employment and the financial hardship that may result. It was proposed that a reduction in the 3 year period be considered; this would be dependent on the maintenance of good mental health, most important would be the continuing and ongoing engagement with mental health services and supportive clinical opinion. It was felt that a reduction in the observation period would be particularly beneficial in those cases where there has been a significant affective disorder clinically and from a licensing view point where driving was being considered using the medium sized vehicle entitlements category C1 and D1. These categories often allow employment to continue when driving the larger full LGV/PCV was felt inappropriate.

It was proposed that DVLA collate numbers of drivers affected and present them to the Panel at the next meeting. The Panel would be circulated for their views on this proposal and further discussion would take place at the spring meeting in 2015.

The proposal for a reduction in the current time period was positively received and would be discussed at the next meeting.

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7. Research Update

Mrs Leach informed the Panel that the Department for Transport had agreed to fund two items of research. Firstly looking at the relationship between medical conditions and road traffic collisions and secondly for the affects of multiple mini medical conditions on driving. That is the cumulative effect of isolated small medical conditions which in themselves would not be debarring but which may have an additive effect which would result in significant impairment affecting safe driving.

8. Any Other Business

There was no AOB.

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting was confirmed as Monday 23 March 2015

DR A M WHITE MB BCh
Panel Secretary

26 September 2014