



MINUTES OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT'S  
HONORARY MEDICAL ADVISORY PANEL ON ALCOHOL, DRUGS AND  
SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND DRIVING  
Meeting held on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**Present:**

**Panel Members:**

Dr David Fox (Chair)	Consultant Occupational Physician
Dr Richard Aspinall	Consultant Hepatologist
Dr Stephen Morley	Consultant in Chemical Pathology
Dr Edward Day	Consultant in Addiction Psychiatry
Dr Robert Searle	Consultant in Anaesthesia and Pain Medicine
Mr James Nutt	Laboratory Operations Manager
Miss Sarah Oldham	Lay Member

**OBSERVERS:**

Professor Denis Cusack	Medical Bureau of Road Safety, Forensic Medicine, Ireland
Dr Ewan Hutchison	Civil Aviation Authority

**GUEST SPEAKER:**

Dr Caroline S Copeland	Senior Lecturer in Pharmacology & Toxicology, Director of the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths
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**EX-OFFICIO:**

Dr Nick Jenkins	Senior DVLA Doctor
Dr Amanda Edgeworth	Deputy Senior DVLA Doctor
Mr Leigh Andrew Bromfield	Driver Licensing Policy Lead
Ms Emma Lewis	Driver Licensing Policy
Ms Carly Murray	Driver Licensing Policy
Mrs Julie Bartlett	Driver Licensing Policy
Mr Dewi Richards	Driver Licensing Policy
Miss Danielle Theophilus	Service Management
Mr Jamie Ward	Senior Lead, Drivers Medical Business Support and Change
Mr Andrew Turner	Drivers Medical Contracts Team
Mr David Snelling	Policy Team Leader, Road Policing Team, DFT
Mrs Siân Taylor	DVLA Panel Coordinator/PA to Senior DVLA Doctor

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## SECTION A: INTRODUCTION

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from,

Dr Sue Stannard	Chief Medical Advisor, Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Dr Bhagat Sharma	Consultant Addiction Psychiatrist

### **2. CHAIR'S REMARKS**

The Chair welcomed panel members and as the new Panel Chair gave an overview of his medical background with regard to his career and current role.

The Chair reminded members to ensure their declarations of interest were up to date, and conflicts of interest were to be declared.

### **3. Actions of the previous meeting**

No actions were carried over from the previous meeting.

## SECTION B: TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

### **4. Persistent Alcohol Misuse/Dependence Update**

Dr Amanda Edgeworth (DVLA Doctor) presented the proposed wording for the updated alcohol standards. These incorporate the clinical features discussed and agreed at previous panel meetings. Dr Edgeworth provided background as to the need for change reflecting DVLA's aspiration to achieve clarity for drivers and their clinicians in addition to improving the evidence-base of the standards.

The draft standards comprise:

- Persistent alcohol misuse standard = alcohol use disorder and alcohol dependence without high-risk features
- Alcohol dependence standard = alcohol dependence with high-risk features which indicate physiological dependence

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Panel discussed the drafts and noted that the proposed operational licensing periods were consistent with current evidence which suggests that the risk of relapse in those individuals who have been diagnosed with severe dependency, and who undergo remission, falls to background population levels after a period of 5 years. Panel also agreed with DVLA proposal that the issue of control of the medical condition should be defined by the individual's clinician rather than by reference to a set number of units consumed, and also agreed with DVLA's proposed triggers for confirmatory laboratory testing should evidence regarding control be equivocal. Panel agreed that DVLA should commence work to operationalise and publish the new standards.

## 5. Drug Driving

Dr Copeland provided a presentation.

Data from the National Programme on Substance Use Mortality (NPSUM, formerly known as the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths [NPSAD]) on fatal Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) where the driver tested positive for drugs administered prior to the RTC were presented.

Cases were delineated by whether they occurred in the five years before or after introduction of the drug-driving legislation in March 2015.

- The main findings were:
- The majority of RTCs occurred in drivers of cars
- The number of RTCs reduced following introduction of the legislation
- The frequency with which quantifications of drugs included in the legislation were performed did not significantly change in the post-legislation period (remained at ~50%) whereas alcohol was quantified in every case
- The rate at which alcohol was listed as a cause of death when it was found to be over the legislated limit was ~50%. Implication rates for cannabis and cocaine detections when found at levels above the legislated limits were 50% and 10%, respectively.
- Some notable drugs which were detected in a number of cases were not included in the legislation, including the opioid codeine and readily available over-the-counter sedating antihistamines, which are used to induce sleep.

Panel thanked Dr Copeland for the detailed and interesting presentation. Panel discussed the interpretation of postmortem drugs, the coroner description regarding the context of the death in a RTC, and then advise in the presence of alcohol/drugs. Panel discussed over the counter medicine and their effects on driving.

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## **6. Alternatives to Carbohydrate-deficient transferrin (CDT) Testing**

The Senior DVLA Doctor and Mr Andrew Turner Drivers Medical Contracts Team, updated the panel regarding DVLA's recently awarded 3-year contract for a CDT testing provider. DVLA plan to commence preparation for future contracts.

Previous panel discussions had suggested that, over time, Phosphatidylethanol (Peth) testing may become regarded as the more appropriate single biomarker for alcohol consumption.

DVLA request panel's ongoing assistance in preparing for future contracts, specifically the biomarker that should be specified and also with regard to any necessary practical issues.

A Panel subgroup including Panel Chair, DVLA Contracts manager, and Senior DVLA Doctor will discuss the issue in more in depth with the aim of identifying the relevant issues for discussion and available panel expertise.

## **7. Hepatic Encephalopathy update**

Dr Richard Aspinall provided an update on considerations regarding Hepatic Encephalopathy.

Following panel's discussions at the Autumn 2023 meeting Dr Aspinall and Dr Jenkins met to identify the issue for further discussion. Dr Aspinall has convened a subgroup meeting co-opting 3 clinical experts - Professor Debbie Shawcross (Clinician Scientist and Professor of Hepatology and Chronic Liver Failure, King's College, London), Dr Neil Rajoriya (Consultant Physician in Liver Transplantation, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham) and Dr Gwilym Webb (Consultant Hepatologist, Cambridge Liver Unit, University Hospitals NHS Trust). The subgroups discussions and recommendations will be brought to the next panel meeting.

## **8. Medical Standard for Drug Treatment Programme**

The medical standards for drug treatment programmes were agreed in 2018 and amended following further panel discussions in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

In 2017 panel advised that all Group 2 applications involving an applicant on a drug treatment programme should be reviewed by panel. This has proved to be logistically impossible as a result of both the number of cases and the resultant delays to licensing decisions.

DVLA request panel to consider the following:

- i. The requirement that "the treatment programme is supervised by a consultant or specialist GP". Does this remain appropriate for current clinical practice?

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- ii. Does panel consider that such panel consideration is necessary for Group 2 licensing?

Dr Edward Day provided a historical background to the introduction of such programmes into clinical practice. Whilst all programmes were initially incorporated into NHS practice, the majority are now managed outside of the NHS and are supervised by non-medical prescribers. Drug treatment programmes are managed in accordance with the guidance published in “Drug Misuse and Dependence. UK guidelines on clinical management” (known as the “Orange Book”). Panel advised that the appropriate wording of this medical standard should reference this document. DVLA thanked panel and will review and return with wording in October panel.

## SECTION C: ONGOING AGENDA ITEMS

### **9. Appeals Data**

Between the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023 to 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024 the number of appeals received was 462. 288 cases were Alcohol and Drug related.

### **10. Tests, Horizon Scanning, Research and Literature**

DVLA reminded all panel members as part of the Terms and Conditions and of their obligation to update panel about any information/tests/research that could impact on standards or existing processes.

Alcohol Interlock Devices were discussed.

### **11. AOB**

Mr David Snelling; Department for Transport update

Ministers are giving consideration to a call for evidence on motoring offences. While details are still being worked up as to its scope, it is expected that it will include drink and drug driving offences.

Ministers have agreed to publish the Government response to the call for evidence on drug driving at the same time as the motoring offences Government response, as there will be many overlapping issues from both.

Panel thanked Mr Snelling for the update.

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DVLA Driving Licensing Policy provided two updates:

**i. Call for evidence**

Driver Licensing Policy discussed the call for evidence. DVLA launched a call for evidence on driver licensing and medical conditions which ran for 12 weeks from 31 July 2023. Evidence was gathered from members of the public and a range of experts across organisations, and responses are currently being analysed to assist with reviewing the existing legislative framework. A summary of the responses will be published in due course.

**ii. Panel recruitment**

Policy provided a composition update; Recruitment process for a Psychiatry Panel chair and new lay members (across all panels) is being orchestrated. Induction day for new members will be held at the end of this year.

**12. Time and Date of next meeting**

Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024

**Original draft minutes prepared by:**

**Sian Taylor  
Note Taker  
Date: 27/03/24**

**Final minutes signed off by:**

**Dr David Fox  
Panel Chair  
Date: 02/05/24**

**THE DVLA WILL CONSIDER THE ADVICE PROVIDED BY THE PANEL AND NO CHANGES TO STANDARDS WILL TAKE EFFECT UNTIL THE IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS AND ROAD SAFETY IS FULLY ASSESSED.**

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