



# 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 23<sup>rd</sup> October 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

### **OBSERVERS:**

Dr Mark Cairns	Civil Aviation Authority
Dr Sue Stannard	Chief Medical Advisor, Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Clare Forshaw	Principal Strategy Implementation Manager RSSB

### **EX-OFFICIO:**

Dr Nick Jenkins	Senior DVLA Doctor
Dr Amanda Edgeworth	Deputy Senior DVLA Doctor
Dr Rajiv Ghose	DVLA Doctor
Dr Laura Tattersall	DVLA Doctor
Dr Sarah Brown	DVLA Doctor
Dr James Galletly	DVLA Doctor
Leigh Andrew Bromfield	Driver Licensing Policy Lead
Carly Murray	Driver Licensing Policy
Julie Bartlett	Driver Licensing Policy
Dewi Richards	Driver Licensing Policy
Danielle Theophilus	Service Management
Tom Mogford	Senior Lead, Drivers Medical Business Support and Change
Mandy Hodgson	Commercial Category Lead
Shareen Gelstharp	Commercial Specialist
Adam Cattroll	Commercial Specialist
Andrew Turner	Drivers Medical Contracts Team
David Snelling	Policy Team Leader, Road Policing Team, DFT
Michael Keaveney	Senior Policy Advisor, Road Safety Division DFT
Katy Adams	DVLA Doctors Casework Management and Support
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,

Mr James Nutt

Professor Denis Cusack

Miss Sarah Oldham

Dr Bhagat Sharma

Laboratory Operations Manager

Medical Bureau of Road Safety, Forensic Medicine, Ireland

Lay Member

Consultant Addiction Psychiatrist

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

The Chair welcomed panel members and 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**

#### **i. Alcohol Misuse / Alcohol dependence – new standards update**

Dr Rajiv Ghose provided a review of cases to which the new standards had been applied since their introduction and publication 27<sup>th</sup> August 2024. This review confirmed the cases had all been actioned appropriately and there had been a significant reduction in the number of Carbohydrate-deficient transferrin (CDT) blood tests requested. Dr Ghose is continuing to collect and review data and will present to panel again at the next meeting. Panel thanked Dr Ghose for providing the data available and look forward to reviewing further analysis at the next meeting. Panel recommended DVLA review the reduction in CDT testing by running a comparative analysis of cases managed when CDT testing was routine with the current more targeted approach to testing.

Dr Amanda Edgeworth provided an update and asked panel for their advice on a few matters for which DVLA needed guidance.

Panel were asked to review and approve an amendment to the wording of the standard; this change makes it clear that only one high risk feature needs to be present for the alcohol dependence with high-risk feature(s) standard to apply. The suggested changes were unanimously approved by panel. In addition, it was agreed the section on page 102 which is specific to alcohol related seizures can now be removed as the presence or absence of an alcohol withdrawal seizure is covered in the main standard.

Panel were asked for their advice on how DVLA should manage cases when there is a history of a high-risk feature and the individual has achieved 3 or more years of control since the high-risk feature, without achieving 3 years of abstinence. Panel were of the opinion CDT

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testing should be used in these cases to confirm controlled drinking. If CDT is favourable the cases should be considered individually by DVLA doctors. Panel members confirmed they are available to provide advice on individual cases when required.

At the panel meeting in October 2023, the following advice was provided. If ten or more years had passed since the high-risk features were present and there had been no relapse, then a new alcohol disorder could be considered as a new episode and the previous features would not impact the medical standard which is applied.

DVLA requested guidance on how to deal with cases when there has been a history of relapse in the 10 years since the high-risk feature, but without any additional episodes of alcohol withdrawal seizures or medication assisted withdrawal.

Panel confirmed the advice provided in 2023 for individuals who had achieved a sustained period of abstinence and/or controlled drinking of 10 years or more. When the case history demonstrates frequent or intermittent relapses into alcohol problems, even if there is no further withdrawal seizures or medication assisted withdrawals from alcohol, then these individuals are a higher risk of relapse and potential impact on road safety. Panel advised these cases should be considered individually by DVLA doctors, with referral to panel member if needed, and careful consideration given to the risk presented.

## **ii. Medical standard for Drug Treatment Programme**

Following the Spring 2024 panel meeting the Senior Medical Doctor discussed the wording of the medical standard for methadone/buprenorphine treatment programmes with Dr Edward Day.

The new proposed standard is consistent with current clinical practice. Panel recommended minor amendments and it is planned that the standard will be published in the next edition of Assessing Fitness to Drive (AFTD)

## **iii. Hepatic encephalopathy, update from subgroup**

Following panel's discussions at the Autumn 2023 meeting Dr Aspinall 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).

It is expected that draft medical standards will be presented for discussion at the Spring 2025 panel meeting.

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## SECTION B: TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

### **4. Appropriate Laboratory test to be commissioned by Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency**

The Senior DVLA Doctor advised that DVLA awarded a 3-year contract for a Carbohydrate-deficient transferrin (CDT) testing provider in early 2024. Work will need to commence shortly in order to invite applications for the contract which will follow on from this.

Previous panel discussions had suggested that CDT may be superseded by Phosphatidylethanol (PEth) as a biomarker for alcohol consumption in future DVLA enquiries.

DVLA confirmed that the purpose of laboratory testing is to allow the customer to demonstrate the ability to control their alcohol consumption.

Panel advised that PEth provides a reflection of alcohol consumption over the previous 28 days. As CDT reflects consumption over the previous 2 weeks PEth would be more suited to allowing demonstration of control of alcohol consumption.

### **5. Department of Transport Update**

The Department for Transport advised, the safety of our roads is an absolute priority for this Government, and that is why they have committed to delivering a new Road Safety Strategy – the first in over a decade. The Government will set out next steps on this in due course.

### **6. High Risk Offenders (HRO) Review**

DVLA Service Management provided an update on the HRO review. The HRO process is a process defined in law for how certain individuals are classed when convicted of driving/being in charge of a motor vehicle whilst under the influence of alcohol. While the process has been in place for many years, earlier this year it was brought to light that an element of the current process required consideration.

Service Management advised to ensure clarity to customers DVLA are adding an information leaflet with letters, this change is planned for December pending internal clearance. This will streamline the process for the customer.

Panel thanked Service Management for the update.

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## SECTION C: ONGOING AGENDA ITEMS

### **7. 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.

DVLA advised panel that it is intended that drug trends and the consequent implications on DVLA's drug testing contract should become a standing agenda item.

Dr Robert Searle advised he would be happy to prepare an update for the panel on the current prescription cannabis landscape. Panel thanked Dr Searle and agreed for Spring 2025.

Dr Morley provided an update re Prof. David Nutt, who is currently producing a non-alcoholic drink, SENTIA which he describes as relaxing without alcohol. Dr Morley is collaborating with Kings College (Dr Copeland and Prof Kim Wolff) on a PhD looking at the effects of SENTIA using a driving simulator. Dr Morley will update if such "herbal" drinks affecting driving and hence relevance to DVLA.

Contracts team advised that any additional information regarding driving simulators would be of value to DVLA, panel noted this request. Additionally, a Medication review will take place shortly and that Panels contribution would be welcomed.

### **8. Appeals Data**

DVLA discussed with panel the appeals figures.

Total number of appeals from 1st sept 2023 - 1st sept 2024 = 360 appeals

- Alcohol and Drug related - 214
- Alcohol Cases – 175
- Drugs Cases - 39
- Cases upheld – 0

Panel discussed the figures, panel thanked DVLA.

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## 9. AOB

DVLA Driving Licensing Policy provided three updates:

### **Panel recruitment**

Policy provided a composition update, advising that they have undertaken a campaign looking for a Psychiatry Panel chair, several expert members and new lay members (across all panels). Panel were asked if any new expertise was required, panel advised they would update DVLA of any additional expertise needed.

### **Call for evidence (CFE)**

On the 31st July, DVLA launched a call for evidence for drivers with medical conditions. Evidence will be gathered from health and other experts across organisations to help DVLA to review the existing legislative framework on which the current medical driving licence processes are based.

Responses will be used to identify areas where policy or legislative changes may be able to improve outcomes for drivers and other road users. The call for evidence closes on the 22nd October 2023 and Panel members were invited to provide their views.

### **Panel Induction sessions at Swansea**

Induction days for new members will be held at the end of this year.

## 10. Time and Date of next meeting

Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**Original draft minutes prepared by:**

**Sian Taylor  
Note Taker  
Date: 24/10/24**

**Final minutes signed off by:**

**Dr David Fox  
Panel Chair  
Date: 09/01/25**

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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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