

Older people lie about their health to keep driving

Many elderly people still on the roads are not fit to drive and tell 'porky pies' on their DVLA form to certify they are fit and healthy, according to a road deaths investigator.

John Apter, a road deaths investigator from Hampshire Constabulary told the Federation/ACPO Roads Policing Conference last month, he was concerned about some elderly drivers not being fit to be on the roads and that they could be a danger to other roads users.

He cited a case he had dealt with where a 93-year-old man had caused the death of a motorcyclist and had later pleaded guilty to death by driving without due care.

Mr Apter told delegates that the man's family had been concerned about him driving at his age and that he had not been checked out by a doctor for around ten years.

When drivers reach the age of 70 they have to fill out a form from the DVLA to say they are fit to drive but Mr Apter said "a huge proportion are telling porky pies and are not fit to drive".

Sgt Ivan Stafford, collision investigator, said families and society had a responsibility to ensure unfit elderly drivers were not out on the roads.

"They [family] have a responsibility to care for elderly drivers, we should say 'you are too old for this now, you are endangering other people'."

He added that GPs have also duty of care to the public in relation to informing the DVLA if someone was unfit to drive.

Age discrimination legislation was raised as a possible barrier to this and Edmund King, president of the AA Foundation, warned that many aging drivers relied on their cars as a 'lifeline'.

He added: "Many elderly drivers give themselves limitations they help to self regulate although I do think families could and should take more of a role."

Young people's under-developed brains are responsible for accidents

Young drivers are most likely to have accidents because their brains have not been exposed to risky situations on the road and they cannot react quickly to avoid them.

Lisa Dorn, from Cranfield University, who has carried out research on driver behaviour revealed that the part of the brain that reacts to risk based on experience does not fully develop until young people are out of their teens and in their 20s.

She was speaking to delegates at the Federation/ACPO Roads Policing Conference in Leicestershire last month, where she showed diagrams charting how the frontal lobe, responsible for risk perception, eye scanning, judgement and decision making develops.

She added that young people also only had a very small scanning area when driving, just over the bonnet, not looking in their mirrors so and missing potential dangers, such as cyclists.

Edmund King, president of the AA, said that although the youngest drivers are the fittest they are ten times more likely to have a crash, particularly in the 17 to 19 year old age bracket.

Psychologist Ms Dorn said that most adults process risk through to a kind of "emotional computer" which allows us to react quickly based on experience but that young people's brains were under developed in this area.

Speaking to roads policing officers, she added that enforcement only alters driver behaviour for three months and that diversion schemes for young people were much more successful.

Diversion schemes have been introduced in some forces to expose young drivers to risks in a controlled environment, such as using e-learning and giving them scenarios where they have to react to a risky situation. The scheme has been running for a year and half and found repeat offending was cut by 60 per cent.

On the road: officers question whether some elderly people should drive



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Safe driving: why grey matters



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