

## **Lessons Learned from Accident Investigations**

### **Training Needed to Evaluate Medical Conditions and Ability to Drive Safely**

Healthcare professionals need improved awareness and training on the adverse impact serious medical conditions and medications have on many of the nation's drivers, according to a report by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

Dozens of people have been killed and injured in accidents in which the NTSB found drivers with serious medical conditions or those who took prescription medicines that impaired their driving. One of the worst was a motorcoach accident in New Orleans in 1999 that claimed 22 lives.

Nearly 200 million Americans are licensed to drive, and many of them have serious medical conditions that may impair the basic functions -- vision, cognition and motor skills -- that are necessary to drive safely. However there is no required training for medical students regarding how to handle -- identify, rehabilitate, refer, counsel, and report -- driving impairment due to medical conditions. Licensed physicians likewise are not required to receive such training, and no State requires any continuing education in the area of assessing and counseling medically impaired drivers.

The NTSB's recommendations, based on the results of a public hearing on Medical Oversight of Noncommercial Drivers in March 2003 and a report in November 2004, include the implementation of course requirements for students in medical and osteopathic schools regarding assessment and counseling of such drivers and the inclusion of a course on the topic in required continuing medical education (CME).

The Safety Board notes an example of the type of tool that can assist physicians in making determinations, recommendations, and referrals regarding their patients' conditions and their effects on driving: *The Physician's Guide to Assessing and Counseling Older Drivers*, published in 2003 through collaboration between the American Medical Association (AMA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Though it references "older drivers" in the title, it is designed to help physicians treating medical conditions that may affect driving at any age. The Guide is approved for CME credits. The AMA, with support from NHTSA, has developed a training program based on the Physician's Guide.

The Physicians' Guide is available for free in print or electronic format from NHTSA at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/OlderDriversBook/> or the AMA at <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/10791.html> The complete NTSB report is available at <http://www.nts.gov/publictn/2004/SIR0401.htm>