**Transcript: Behind the Wheel: The BMV Medical Unit (June 2021)**

Welcome to Behind the Wheel, an audio interview series where you can learn about motor vehicle topics in the State of Maine. Here is your host Larry Boivin.

We are Behind the Wheel and on this month's edition of Behind the Wheel we're going to talk about a point of discussion that a lot of us as drivers don't realize but we do encounter as a driver license operator in the State of Maine and that is Maine's functional ability profiles and to discuss this we have Maine's medical review coordinator Thea Fickett with us so Thea welcome to the program.

Thank you.

So -- medical review coordinator how long have you done it and tell us about the job itself.

Well I've been in the position for eight years and the position involves a few different things. First of all I am actually the liaison between our medical advisory board and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles and I'll describe that in a minute but in addition to that I also work with drivers who have questions and concerns or are upset about processes that might be taking place. I work with physicians and other clinicians that have questions about our processes and how to fill out our forms. I do training with staff and with community groups and physician groups we process many different kinds of medical conditions that require review and we do that on the basis of standards that are established by our medical advisory board. The medical advisory board by law is appointed by our secretary of state and they are the ones that actually formulate recommendations for standards to determine competence for driving for people who have mental, emotional or physical conditions.

So we have a lot to talk about here. Your background coming into the position what was that?

Well I'm actually a registered nurse although in this position I don't function in that capacity and I'm also a health educator and that is my role here.

Talk to me a little bit about the manual the functional ability profile; from a high level what does that mean?

So these are basically our rules, the rules that we use to review drivers that have medical conditions that could potentially pose a risk for driving so in the state of Maine as opposed to some other states where physicians are required to report medical conditions to the department of motor vehicles in the state of Maine it's actually the driver's responsibility to report conditions to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles when they have a condition that could potentially impair their ability to drive so the way we find out most of the time about that is that on our applications. There's a question about medical conditions and drivers are asked to disclose whether or not they have certain conditions or even if it's not listed another condition that could potentially affect their driving.
So we have the functional ability profiles which are the standards that we use for reviewing conditions so that we have consistency in the review and so that there's clear standards for us when we are looking at various conditions so that we know how to process the paperwork and whether or not the person is going to be cleared to continue driving and not require anything else or whether they may potentially need to be reviewed periodically, which means that we would ask them to be evaluated by their physician on an ongoing basis to determine if they remain safe to drive or if they need a restriction to their driver's license. A good example that most people are familiar with would be a restriction to corrective lenses for instance or whether they may need a road test or whether maybe in some cases they may not be safe to continue to operate.

I think when we think of driving and possible medical conditions vision seems to be one obviously that's so important. What do we have as a standard to drive in Maine for vision?

Okay so for visual acuity the standard for driving without any restrictions would be 20/40 for visual acuity or better obviously and if the person does not require corrective lenses to achieve that they drive without any restrictions. If they need corrective lenses to achieve that then they get a restriction to corrective lenses if their vision is not good enough to meet that particular standard either with or without correction it doesn't necessarily mean that they can't drive. We have a standard of 2100 in the best eye with or without correction and a person with that visual acuity would still be allowed to continue to drive and if they meet that with corrective lenses again they would have that restriction. If they meet it without corrective lenses then they whatever their best vision is that they can achieve with or without correction is what they would be allowed to drive with. If they have vision that's worse than that then they would not be allowed to drive as far as visual acuity is concerned however if a person meets the vision requirement uh of being at least 2100 but they don't meet the requirement of being 20/40 then they um they would be restricted in that sense to driving only during daylight hours.

So there is leeway in this process --there is, yes -- so there is some um allowance for people who don't meet our ideal visual standard to still be able to drive if they if they have at least one eye that meets the 2100 standard.

Thanks for listening to this episode of Behind the Wheel a production of the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles in collaboration with Secretary of State Shenna Bellows. For more information on a variety of motor vehicle topics visit our webpage at maine.gov/sos/bmv