**Transcript: Behind the Wheel: The BMV Medical Unit Part II (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 traveling Behind the Wheel and we're traveling behind the wheel with Thea Fickett, Maine's medical review coordinator for the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. We are talking about functional ability profiles, the manual, the rules and there are a number of conditions that are part of that manual. How many are there?

Well the sections that are actually defined in the book um are limited there's uh 14. However really and truly there's more than that because if you look within for instance within vision there's actually a functional ability profile for visual acuity there's a functional ability profile for peripheral vision there's also one for double vision so there's more than that as well as some conditions that aren't even listed that would be included within what we would expect to review for a person.

And I have to think as Maine's population is aging there are a number of folks that may have more than one medical condition that's being reviewed correct?

Yes there are many times when that happens so just as an example maybe a person has um atrial fibrillation which is a condition that we actually review maybe they also have diabetes and because of their diabetic medications they have problems with low blood sugar hypoglycemia so they might be being reviewed for both of those conditions or maybe they have a history of a stroke and they also maybe have a vision disorder or deficit so there can be multiple conditions that a person's being reviewed for or a person might only have one condition.

In the course of a year how many cases would be reviewed by the medical review area?

Sure so uh in 2020 we reviewed between 37 and 38,000.

Wow so there's a lot of interaction, I would have to imagine, between customer physician clinician and our medical review staff.

Yes there's a lot of interaction so it can be something as simple as a person calling in to say you know "I turned my form in did you get it is everything okay" to someone who's received a notice of suspension and wants to know what's going on and doesn't understand and needs to have an explanation. We often reach out to doctors offices because we need more information than what we got on the forms that came in or in some cases they're reaching out to us because they have questions about how to fill out the form they're not really sure don't understand the rules completely and aren't sure how to fill out the form on behalf of one of their patients.

Are the rules available online?

Yes they are available on the Bureau of Motor Vehicles medical requirements website.

And I suspect with conditions evolving and studies that are done that these rules are looked at on an ongoing basis?

Yes as far as uh review for changes and updates is that yeah so we do have our medical advisory board that is actually currently at the moment in the process of reviewing the rules and considering what updates and changes need to be made and ideally they would be looked at about probably every three to five years.

And when was the latest set of rules enacted?

They were became effective on December 31st of 2016.

 And we're currently looking as you say looking at uh updating them?

Yes so the hope or the desire is to have them complete and uh finally by 2023 if everything goes as planned.

So this whole process and you talked earlier about physicians clinicians that are involved in our medical advisory board --who are these people and where are they in the State of Maine? Do they come from the entire state or is there one area that they're representing?

No, we have physicians from different parts of the state and based on our the statute that dictates who needs to be on the board. At a minimum we're required to have at least eight different specialties that are specified in law and those physicians that represent those specialties come from different places. We have some from Portland from Brunswick we have some from the Bangor area from Dover Foxcroft. I mean they come from different places and as the board membership changes the locations of the physicians change you know maybe in some at some points in time we've had people from central Maine so they come from around the state.

You mentioned that when you get this information it's not a requirement for doctors to report conditions but I would have to imagine in terms of safety that probably that's the primary driving force to get conditions reported to make sure folks are safe on the road.

Actually no the most frequent source of information for us is drivers reporting their conditions on their applications when they come to get a license for the first time whether it's a permit or a license a renewal a duplicate if they're changing from one class of license to another that medical question is on our form so they answer that we become aware that they have a condition. We give them the driver medical evaluation form to take to their physician they the physician fills that out and sends it into us so we become aware most often by the driver disclosing their own condition. Second though would be clinicians who report because they have concern for their drivers for the for their patients and so that gets turned into us and there is law within Maine that protects clinicians who report in good faith even if they report without the permission of the driver although we don't mandate that they report they are allowed to report without the driver's permission and they are protected by immunity law in the state of Maine. So as part of the reporting process in the form that would need to be filled out for the medical condition.

What happens if I don't do it?

Well so the Bureau of Motor Vehicles doesn't go tracking people down to try to find out if they've been truthful on their form or not but on the form itself it actually does say I understand that knowingly supplying false information on this form is a Class D crime under Title 17a punishable by confinement up to 364 days or monetary fine of up to two thousand dollars or both. So although we don't go tracking people down there is the potential there for something to come up later and a good example would be let's just say if a person gets involved in a crash and there's property damage or or hopefully not but possibly harm to another person or another person's death then it doesn't really have anything to do with motor vehicles but in the legal scenario when that kind of information comes out it may not bode well for the driver who has failed to disclose their condition. Let's say if a person has a seizure disorder as an example and their seizure disorder hasn't been disclosed and their seizure their seizure disorder hasn't been being treated appropriately or they haven't been following their treatment. If that becomes information that the other party is aware of it obviously is going to make the liability for the person who caused the crash because of their medical condition to be at higher risk of some kind of negative consequences so this medical review process is really intended for the safety of not only the entire driving public but also for the one that has the medical condition. I would say yes for sure.

What's the best thing about your job?

Well I like problem solving and I have a lot of opportunity to solve problems and I like education and I have a lot of opportunity to help people understand you know what's involved why they're being required to do that this particular task which many people aren't excited about. So I have the opportunity to help them understand and feel more comfortable.

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