**Transcript: Behind the Wheel: The BMV Medical Unit Part III (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 our guest on this edition is Thea Fickett. Thea is the Bureau of Motor Vehicles medical review coordinator and as part of that program there is a functional ability profile manual that's available on the bureau of motor vehicles website so all of us can take a look at it. And I have to imagine that as an aging population that all of us not only should we be aware of it is that manual presented in a fashion that the lay person can actually understand?

I would say um probably yes for the most part it's definitely available publicly and so anyone can look at it and if anyone looks at it and has questions they can certainly feel free to call the bureau of motor vehicles and ask questions about anything that they aren't clear on. These are also distributed to physicians and various clinicians throughout the state so most of the doctors who are involved in specialties that routinely work with us. The last time around we did mail them copies of the rules and of course they're available on our website so anyone who wants to have them can access them free of charge without any problem and if you if a person has difficulty accessing them online they can certainly get in touch with us and we'll help them to be able to do that.

Is diabetes a condition that is something that it's obviously prevalent but does it prohibit anyone from driving?

So no not directly we used to review diabetes for many many years as a condition that we required updates on and we're actually kind of in a transition period still because when the rules changed in 2016 diabetes as a condition that needed review went away however we added hypoglycemia which is low blood sugar and many people with diabetes actually experience low blood sugar because of their medications so rather than just eliminating those ongoing reviews for people with diabetes we put them we now have them being reviewed the first time around for hypoglycemia. So whenever their diabetes review came due they're actually being asked to provide us with a form for hypoglycemia and then of course new drivers coming in are being asked that question up front on the application so if a person has diabetes and does not have hypoglycemia then we clear them and we don't continue to review them for diabetes. Obviously diabetes that can have many complications that can affect driving. Vision is another area peripheral neuropathy is something else so there are other complications of diabetes that we are concerned about and do review but just having the diagnosis of diabetes is not something that we um require review of.

What about those that may have limb amputations are they still able to operate?

Yes so a person with a limb amputation is I would say almost always going to still be able to operate a motor vehicle in most or many cases. They may be required to take a road test to demonstrate that they are able and whether or not they need adaptive equipment for their vehicle but I would say by far most people with an amputation are going to be continuing to drive. Those with seizures are they able to drive? Yes a person with a seizure disorder is allowed to drive as long as they don't as long as their seizure condition is controlled so there are different criteria depending on what caused the seizure and how long it's been since the person had a seizure. So a person with a seizure may be suspended and not allowed to drive for a period of time following a seizure but then like I said depending on what caused the seizure and so on they usually are allowed to resume driving within three to six months after a seizure.

So it seems as though the medical review program is one that is more proactive rather than being looking at pulling people off of the road.

Oh for sure the desire of the motor bureau of motor vehicles is not to take people off the road it's to make sure that people are safe to drive and so we do look at it proactively because we know that certain medical conditions have an increased risk statistically for crashes so we focus our attention on those conditions that are of that are common and of most concern in terms of what we actually describe. So we want to make sure that people can continue to drive if at all possible. In some cases they need restrictions. A good example of that would be somebody with a respiratory condition where they have trouble maintaining their oxygen levels and we require that a person be able to maintain their oxygen level at 89 percent or above and if they can do that on room air great if they have to use oxygen to maintain that level then they're going to be restricted to driving with oxygen as an example. Or let's say a person who has muscular dystrophy they may you know over time have a decline in their ability to function and carry out activities of daily living and that can affect their ability to drive so if their lower extremities become weak and difficult to control they may need to have hand controls and so they would be required to take a road test demonstrating that they can drive safely with their hand controls. So we do allow people with many different kinds of deficits or handicaps if you want to call it that to be able to continue to drive but we just want to make sure that they're safe and that they have appropriate restrictions or limitations if those are necessary.

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