

Older Driver Screening Program Expands to Other Counties, Law Enforcement

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U *C San Diego experts started original program in 2007*

Keeping older drivers safe behind the wheel is the goal of a successful program at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, now expanding into additional counties. A team of experts from UCSD's Trauma Epidemiology and Injury Prevention Research Center received two grants to expand the program, which focuses on ways to assist older drivers who may be at risk for a crash due to age-related health problems. On Tuesday, January 18 at 10:30 a.m., the UCSD team will join law enforcement officials to discuss the grants at a news conference at the California Highway Patrol (CHP) Border Division headquarters at 9330 Farnham Street, San Diego, CA.

"Our goal is to help older drivers and their physicians identify and address medical conditions that could interfere with safe driving," said Linda Hill, MD, MPH, clinical professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at UCSD School of Medicine. "Treatment may be as simple as a new pair of glasses, some adaptive equipment for the car, or physical therapy to improve range of motion. However, there are times when driving safely is no longer possible and health care practitioners need to know the signs and symptoms to watch for."

Hundreds of health care professionals in the San Diego region have been trained through the TREDs (Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety) program using the American Medical Association's screening standards for adult drivers over age 65. The training provides skills to screen and diagnose, make referrals and, when necessary, assist their older patients through the inevitable transition into driving retirement. Hill and her team will expand training to eligible physicians, nurses, medical assistants, occupational therapists and health care workers at hospitals and outpatient medical sites in Riverside, San Bernardino, and Imperial counties, as well as continue their work in the San Diego area.

The TREDs group is expanding its efforts to promote safety for older drivers by encouraging law enforcement to aid in the identification and referral of at-risk drivers.

“Getting older does not mean the end of a person’s driving days,” said CHP Chief Jim Abele, commander of CHP’s Border Division. “It’s the perfect time to evaluate, improve and maintain the safety and mobility of California’s senior drivers.”

On a daily basis, law enforcement officers face the challenge of sensitively handling older motorists who are driving unsafely. Sensitivity training as well as how to recognize medical conditions which can mimic ‘driving under the influence’ are now available to law enforcement organizations in selected counties within Southern California.

“If age-related driving issues are left unaddressed, there is a risk of injury, not only to the older adults themselves, but also to their families and to others who share the road,” said Hill. “Our communities rely on these professionals to look out for our seniors’ well-being.”

Funding for both programs is provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The DMV Senior Ombudsman Program and the San Diego Driver Safety Office collaborated with and support UC San Diego’s efforts to engage health professionals and law enforcement in this endeavor.

The grant team, led by Hill, includes Raul Coimbra, MD, PhD, professor of surgery and chief, UCSD Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care and Burns; Kathy Fischer, MD, clinical professor in the UCSD Department of Family and Preventive Medicine; Jill Rybar, project manager; and Tara Styer, MPH, and Jana Jahns, MEd, training coordinators. For additional information or to schedule trainings, email TREDS@ucsd.edu or call 858-534-9330.

Background

According to the California Office of Traffic Safety, in 2008 San Diego County ranked 22nd in fatal and injury collisions, out of 58 counties with populations over 250,000. San Diego County’s population is 1,233,000, with 10.5 percent of individuals 65 and over; this population is rapidly increasing in San Diego County, as elsewhere.

Most age-related driving disorders (ARDDs) fall into three areas: impaired vision, physical limitations, and declining mental acuity. Researchers who screened seniors in the Road Safe Senior Project found that 6 percent of older adults who are still driving have medical conditions that put them at risk for a moving violation citation (MVC), and 12 percent have conditions that preclude driving. It is of concern that nearly one in five older adults who have been screened by this program has a major deficit that could affect their ability to drive safely.

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The Trauma Epidemiology and Injury Prevention Research Center

The Trauma Epidemiology and Injury Prevention Research Center is a combined effort of the Division of Trauma, Surgical Critical Care, and Burns with its Level-1 Trauma Center and the

Regional Burn Center and the UCSD Department of Preventive Medicine to investigate and implement preventive strategies to decrease fatalities and permanent disabilities following injury.

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