

January 04, 2012 | By Kim Edwards

UC San Diego Training Program on Driving Safety Expands Statewide

Program showed success in training health care, law enforcement

The University of California, San Diego School of Medicine TREDs (Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety) program has been awarded a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety to continue their work on driving safety in older adults. This team of experts, part of UCSD's Injury Epidemiology, Prevention and Research Center, has been working to keep San Diego County's highways and senior drivers safe since 2007.

"Both health care and law enforcement can play an important role in the identification and referral of drivers who may be at risk for a collision," said Linda Hill, MD, MPH, clinical professor in the Department of Family and Preventive Medicine at UCSD School of Medicine. "Physicians have knowledge of a patient's medical history and the medications that can impact driving, while law enforcement witnesses and responds to unsafe driving first hand."

Family members of older drivers often seek guidance from these professionals in an effort to keep their loved ones safe behind the wheel. TREDs educates health care providers on the American Medical Association's screening guidelines that assess for vision, strength and cognitive impairment in adults over age 70. The focus of the law enforcement training is to increase recognition of medical conditions that can impact driving and referral resources.

"We have trained more than 1000 health professionals and more than 700 law enforcement officers in Southern California Counties. Now, these successful programs will benefit the most traffic-congested areas in the state, Los Angeles and Orange Counties," said Hill. "And soon health professionals throughout California will have the opportunity to receive the training online."

Early identification of conditions is paramount to the continuation of safe driving. 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. Training health care practitioners and law enforcement

officials will better equip them to help older drivers maintain mobility for as long as safely possible.

“Older adults have positive driving attributes like experience, being more likely to follow laws and less likely to take risks; however, as a group, their rates of death per distance driven and per population is as high as that of teenage boys,” Raul Coimbra, MD, PhD, FACS, chief of the Division of Trauma at UC San Diego Health System and founder of the UCSD Injury Epidemiology, Prevention and Research Center. “In addition, elderly drivers and their passengers are four times more likely to die than their 20-year-old counterparts in crashes of similar intensity.”

“The California Highway Patrol appreciates the training provided by the University of California, San Diego. This training has enabled our officers to better serve our older drivers by recognizing driving impairment and make referrals to community resources. We are grateful for the contributions senior drivers have made to our communities over the past decades and want to best serve them while they continue to enjoy their driving experiences,” said Chief Jim Abele from the California Highway Patrol.

“The goal of these programs is to improve driving safety in older adults by increasing awareness, education and management of the health-related impairments which result from the aging process,” explained Richard Kohr, Senior Driver Ombudsman for the California Department of Motor Vehicles – Southern Region.

Funding for this program 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 Coimbra; Jill Rybar, MPH, project manager; and Tara Styer, MPH, training coordinator. For additional information or to schedule trainings, email TREDS@ucsd.edu or call 858-534-9330.

Background/Data

The AARP states that beginning in 2011, eight thousand Baby Boomers will be turning 65 each day and these projections are expected to continue for the next 18 years. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that by the year 2020, there will be

more than 40 million licensed drivers over the age of 65, and six million drivers over 65 in California by the year 2030.

Older adults often experience a decline in cognition, vision and motor skills required to complete many tasks associated with driving. AAA reports that nearly 70 percent of older adults surveyed were using one or more prescription medications that could impair driving ability.

According to San Diego County, 1408 individuals over 65 years of age were involved in traffic crashes, accounting for 10 percent of all people injured and 16 percent of all traffic fatalities in 2008.

The Injury Epidemiology, Prevention and Research Center

The UCSD Injury Epidemiology, Prevention and 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 make our communities safer and to decrease the burden of injuries to our society.

MEDIA CONTACT

Kim Edwards, kedwards@ucsd.edu, 619-543-6163

UC San Diego's [Studio Ten 300](#) offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via studio@ucsd.edu. To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts>.