

Family Health

By CLAY WILLIAMS

Target-Impaired Drivers

A driver's license has got to be something akin to a person's most treasured possession. Usually it is the first official document we receive as a teenager. On the other end of life's spectrum, it is accepted as evidence that we are still in control of our physical and mental faculties sufficiently to operate an automobile.

When a driver is involved in a blatant automobile blunder, there sometimes emits from the public a hue and cry that his or her license should be taken forthwith. When the blunder happens to be someone in the previously mentioned age range, the wails turn into shattering crescendos — capability notwithstanding.

While attention is riveted on driving inefficiencies of the young and old — especially the old — another group piles up a mountain of accident statistics resulting in a monumental loss of life and property. I refer to the drunk driver. But whether driver impairment is the result of alcohol, age, physical or mental impairment, the State has a program to deal with the problem — efficiently — and they do. It is called the N.C. Driver Medical Evaluation System.

The DMES is a cooperative effort between the Depart-

ment of Motor Vehicles (DMV), the State Medical Society and the Division of Health Services. Whenever a driver is found to have a disability sufficient to impair his driving effectiveness — one that an examiner cannot properly evaluate — he is asked to have his doctor complete a medical report on him. Results of the report are computerized by DMV and become a part of the driver's history. The report is then sent to the MES office for review by Dr. Fred Patterson, medical advisor, and Douglas Wooten, who heads the program.

While options available to the medical advisor, plus appeals open to the impaired driver may indicate the process of review is plodding, the importance of a driving license must be considered in terms of the disadvantage one suffers when deprived of mobility in the "instant" society in which we live. Based upon facts of the case, the medical advisor may modify driving privileges or request further review by a panel of doctors selected from 36 designated medical consultants from throughout the state. The panel's opinions are arrived at independently. The medical advisor makes his decision based on those opinions and any other pertinent information available to him.

The judicious review process also grants a supposedly impaired driver the right of appeal — first to a driver license medical review board and ultimately to Superior Court.

When one notes the 359 alcohol-related road deaths in N.C. in 1980, not to mention 12,000 injuries, public condemnation of the courts for seeming leniency, is understandable. Wooten tends to side with the public in the matter and feels the total court system is probably too lenient in dealing with drunk drivers.

There is no questioning the effectiveness of the DMES. And while we sometimes seethe at the carnage caused by an obviously impaired driver (for whatever reason), it is well to remember that there are thousands operating vehicles in a safe manner who have accepted restrictions handed out by the DMES.

It would be easy and altogether fitting, according to some, to establish dictatorial rules and regulations in evaluating impaired drivers, but that is not the American way. While we may fret over judicial ineptness and bureaucratic deliberateness in dealing with impaired drivers, we must, nevertheless, applaud the N.C. Driver Medical Evaluation System for its safeguards against overkill. After all — there but for the grace of God go I. (A service of the N.C. Academy of Family Physicians.)

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YOUR GARDEN

Helpful Hints On Using Protective Chemicals Safely

SAFE STORING—DO'S & DON'T'S

Here are some common sense do's and don'ts about the proper way to store the protective chemicals you use. The tips are from the safety experts at Ortho, the country's leading manufacturer of home garden chemicals.

- DO keep chemicals in their original containers. Never remove the labels. All containers should be securely capped.

- DON'T ever store garden chemicals in soft drink bottles or any other containers that could lead anyone to mistake the contents for food or drink.

- DO store chemicals on strong, stable shelves, out of reach of children.

- DON'T store chemicals near food.

- DO remember chemicals are best stored in a locked, well-ventilated space, out of the sun and clear of pilot lights and other open flames, since fumes could catch fire. A garden shed, tool room or garage is better than a basement in the house.

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