Section 1

Introduction

1.1 A guide for physicians

The CMA has prepared this handbook to help physicians determine whether their patients are medically fit to drive a motor vehicle safely. Many of the recommendations are the same as the standards found in such similar documents as the *National Safety Code* (NSC) produced under the auspices of the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators. The NSC was developed in meetings of the medical consultants from each province who are responsible for advising the motor vehicle licensing authorities on medical matters and safety in driving. They created the NSC as a means of achieving uniform standards across Canada with the result that a driver licensed in one province is considered licensed in all other provinces. To minimize impediments to commercial drivers who work across the border, the NSC also recognizes standards in the United States.

This edition of the CMA's guide was designed to serve as a handy resource and user-friendly tool for physicians. The text is supplemented with tables for certain key medical conditions and recommendations. The guide also lists the medical conditions affecting a person's ability to drive, generally in descending order of importance in terms of their association with risk for motor vehicle crashes. Other innovations include an index, extensive use of subheadings, an expanded appendix containing tools for evaluating alcohol and dementia illnesses and contact names and numbers for the provincial and territorial ministries of transportation.

1.2 Changes to the guide

Physicians who have comments and suggestions about the guide's recommendations are invited to write to the CMA at 1867 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa ON K1G 3Y6.

1.3 Methods

To produce this edition, the CMA undertook a broad-based consultation exercise under the leadership of a Project Advisory Group, comprising 4 member physicians with a range of relevant practice and advisory experience pertaining to driver safety. The group worked with the 1991 CMA *Physicians' Guide to Driver Examination* (5th

edition) and the 1997 BCMA's *Guide for Physicians in Determining Fitness to Drive a Motor Vehicle*, taking into consideration comments on the BCMA guide, solicited from CMA-affiliated medical specialty societies and provincial regulatory agencies, to produce a draft for this new edition. The draft was widely circulated to medical and nonmedical organizations, provincial driving authorities and selected experts. Over 100 sets of comments were received during this phase of consultations, many of them extremely detailed. All comments were considered by the Project Advisory Group.

Although there is still comparatively little scientific evidence available to assess the degree of impairment to driving that results from most medical disabilities, the evidence is increasing. The advisory group was aided in its deliberations by a review of recent scientific reports for each section in the guide. However, the recommendations remain mainly empirical and represent that the driving standards are based on the consensus opinion of an expert panel supported by a careful review of the pertinent research, examination of international and national standards and consensus, as well as the collected experience of a number of specialists in the area. They are intended to impose no more than common sense restrictions on drivers with medical disabilities. This guide is not a collection of hard-and-fast rules; nor does it have the force of law.

Every physician who examines a patient to determine fitness to drive must always consider both the interest of the patient and the welfare of the community exposed to the patient's driving. In the course of the examination, the physician should look not only for physical disabilities but also should endeavour to assess the patient's mental and emotional fitness to drive safely. Either a single major impairment or multiple minor defects may make it unsafe for the person to drive. The physician should also be aware of the circumstances in which patients will likely function. For example, the extreme demands related to operating police and emergency vehicles suggest that drivers of these vehicles should be cautioned that even relatively minor defects may make it unsafe for them to drive.

1.4 Drivers' medical examination report

If, after completing a driver's medical examination, a physician is undecided about a patient's fitness to drive, the physician should consider arranging for a consultation with an appropriate specialist. A copy of the specialist's report should accompany the medical form when it is returned to the motor vehicle licensing authority. Where no opinion is given or where the report differs significantly from previous reports submitted by other physicians or with statements made by the driver, the motor vehicle licensing authority will often ask its own medical consultants for a recommendation.

1.5 Payment for medical and laboratory examinations

In some jurisdictions, patients are responsible for paying for all the medical reports and

laboratory examinations carried out for the purpose of obtaining or retaining a driver's licence, even though these examinations or tests may have been requested by the motor vehicle licensing authority. In other provinces, it is the responsibility of the employers of the drivers to cover such costs.

1.6 Levels of medical fitness required by the motor vehicle licensing authorities

The motor vehicle licensing authorities have the power to issue and suspend licences. Legislation in the provincial and territorial jurisdictions stipulates that the motor vehicle licensing authorities can require licensed drivers to be examined for their fitness to drive. "Fitness" is considered to mean fitness in the medical sense.

The provincial motor vehicle licensing authorities have the final responsibility for determining medical fitness. The recommendations of the CMA outlined in this guide are meant to assist physicians in determining whether a person is likely to be medically fit.

The motor vehicle licensing authorities require a higher level of fitness from professional drivers who operate passenger-carrying vehicles, trucks and emergency vehicles. These drivers spend many more hours at the wheel, often under far more adverse driving conditions, than private vehicle drivers. Professional drivers are usually unable to select their hours of work and cannot readily abandon their passengers or cargo should they become unwell while on duty. Professional drivers may also be called on to undertake heavy physical work, such as loading or unloading their vehicles, realigning shifted loads and putting on and removing chains. In addition, should the professional driver suffer a collision, the consequences are much more likely to be serious, particularly when the driver is carrying passengers or dangerous cargo.

People operating emergency vehicles are frequently required to drive under considerable stress because of the nature of their work. Inclement weather, when driving conditions are less than ideal, is often a factor. This group should also be expected to meet higher medical standards than private drivers.

1.7 Classes of drivers' licences and vehicles

Drivers' licences are divided into classes according to the types of motor vehicles the holder is permitted to drive. The classifications can vary across the jurisdictions, and graduated licensing systems are being investigated in some jurisdictions. In this guide, therefore, licences and vehicles are classified in a generic sense, and readers should refer to the provincial or territorial classification when necessary.

Class 1: Permits the operation of a motor vehicle of any type or size with or without passengers, and a trailer of any size.

Class 2: Permits the operation of a motor vehicle of any type or size with or without passengers. A Class 2 licence does not permit the holder to pull a semi-trailer.

Class 3: Permits the operation of a motor vehicle of any size. A Class 3 licence does not permit the holder to carry passengers or to pull a semi-trailer.

Class 4: Permits the operation of a taxicab, a bus carrying no more than 24 passengers, and emergency response vehicles such as ambulances, fire-trucks and police cars.

Class 5: Permits the operation of any motor vehicle, small truck or combination up to 11 000 kg (towed vehicle cannot exceed 4,600 kg). A Class 5 licence does not permit the holder to drive an ambulance, a taxicab or a bus or to pull a semi-trailer.

Class 6: Permits the operation of a motorcycle, motor scooter or minibike only. All other classes must be endorsed to include Class 6 before the holder may operate a motorcycle, motor scooter or minibike.