Driving Safely with Parkinson’s
Frank Pilarski, OTR/L, CDRS
February 27th, 2015, VA Portland HCS
Why do we drive?

Groceries

Doctor’s appointments
Visit family and friends

Go to work

Fishing!
Freedom & Independence

Not wish to be a burden to others

How can Parkinson’s affect Driving?
Visual inattention

“You tell his mom you only looked down for a second.”

Spatial perception

Cognitive flexibility

NW PADRECC
VA Portland Health Care System
www.parkinsons.va.gov/northwest
Bradykinesia

Rigid muscles/joints

Loss of automatic movements

NW PADRECC
VA Portland Health Care System
www.parkinsons.va.gov/northwest
Tremors

Medications

Other medical conditions

NW PADRECC
VA Portland Health Care System
www.parkinsons.va.gov/northwest
• 62 yrs old: avg age of diagnosis

Parkinson’s and Older Drivers (62+)
• Most common traffic violations that lead to excessive crash rates for older adults are:
  failure to obey signs & traffic lights,
  making unsafe left turns,
  failure to safely pass other vehicles,
  failure to yield the right of way, and
  inappropriate turns.

These violations are not caused by an “obedience problem” but rather by attentional errors.

Can I still drive with Parkinson’s?
Most likely, “Yes”,
in the early stages,
if symptoms are well managed.

Aerobically fit and active; exercise:
flexibility neck/back good posture,
endurance

Ron Blehm, PT

Eat and sleep well
Pick optimum times and places to drive; avoid nighttime, bad weather, rush hour

Not much fun

No, thank you
Reduce distractions:
- cell phones
- radios
- conversations with passengers
Technology:

back-up cameras
GPS
blindspot warning systems
hand controls
smart cars?
Blind Spot Warning

Hand controls for gas/brake

Legal in Nevada, Cal, Fla and Michigan commercially available 2017?
Wear your seat belt

When to ease back or retire from driving?

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you should check your skills. You may need to change your driving habits:

Has a friend or family member expressed concern about your driving?
Has your doctor advised you to limit driving for health reasons?

Have you been pulled over by a police officer and warned about poor driving behavior?

Have you been stopped by the police or had near misses or accidents in the last 3 years?
Unexplained dents and scratches on your vehicle?
Do your thoughts wander when you drive?

Do you become confused or angry when driving?

Do other drivers honk at you frequently?
Do cars or people walking seem to appear out of nowhere?

Do you make inappropriate or involuntary lane changes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributing causes of lane change crashes</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improper driving</td>
<td>4.76%</td>
<td>3.87%</td>
<td>2.44%</td>
<td>3.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrelated driving</td>
<td>32.26%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>24.66%</td>
<td>25.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed to yield</td>
<td>7.62%</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>6.93%</td>
<td>6.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper lane change*</td>
<td>50.79%</td>
<td>64.26%</td>
<td>50.25%</td>
<td>54.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper passing</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other</td>
<td>13.15%</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
<td>10.24%</td>
<td>9.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Blind spot or involuntarily changed direction

Are you Failing to observe traffic signs or signals?
Making slow or poor decisions?

Hitting the curb or rumble strips while driving?

Driving at an inappropriate/variable speed (often too slow)?
Do you have trouble moving your foot between the gas and brake pedals, or do you confuse the two?

Do you sometimes get lost on familiar routes or difficulty navigating to familiar places?

Having that difficult conversation
Be respectful

Have the conversation long before it becomes a problem

Focus on the shared goal of safe mobility first

SAFE DRIVE
STAY ALIVE

NW PADRECC
VA Portland Health Care System
www.parkinsons.va.gov/northwest
Talk of “retirement” from driving, not “quitting” or “taking your keys away”.

Help the driver come up with reasons for not driving:

“When do you think it will be time?”

Wean off night driving freeways trips to the VA
Acknowledge accomplishments and long history of safe driving but focus on the future.

Acknowledge how the driver feels and avoid arguments trying to convince.

Strength in numbers; children, siblings, firefighting buddies.