PRACTICE

WHAT YOUR PATIENT IS THINKING

Losing my licence meant I lost my independence

Zoe Barber describes how losing her driving licence affected her and how health professionals could have helped her better prepare for this lack of independence.

Zoe Barber

In 2019 I gave birth to twins via planned caesarean section. Shortly after their birth I had a large haemorrhage and needed to return to theatre. While the team was preparing me for theatre I became unwell and had a seizure, which was later confirmed to be a result of eclampsia. Thanks to the prompt and expert care of my healthcare teams I made a full recovery, and my babies were healthy and well.

Informing the DVLA

Later, a friend told me that I should inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) about the seizure. Although I was aware of the DVLA's guidance on driving after a caesarean section, I hadn't thought about informing them of my eclampsia. I had assumed that because the seizure was a result of pregnancy my risk of having another seizure would be small. My healthcare team hadn't mentioned anything about my fitness to drive in any of my follow-up appointments.

I contacted the DVLA who told me I could continue to drive following my medical team's advice. They sent me some forms to complete about the seizure and I didn't think anything else of it. A few days later I received a letter telling me I was no longer allowed to drive. My licence had been revoked for six months. This ban on driving was effective immediately.

Losing my independence

As a new mother of twins, not being able to drive was devastating. I felt that my independence had been taken away. Tasks such as going to the supermarket, baby groups, or to my parents' or in laws' houses for help were now impossible. I was terrified that I would have no way of getting to the hospital if one of my babies was ill. I was suddenly completely dependent on my family and friends for everything. I felt isolated and constantly reminded of how unwell I'd been. The DVLA suggested using local cycle routes, which wasn't feasible with two new babies. Finding taxis to fit two car seats in was also a struggle.

Keeping me in the loop

On receiving the DVLA letter I contacted my healthcare provider, who was understanding. She shared with me a copy of the letter she had written to the DVLA (once she had sent it), which made me feel supported. She also helped me review the medical literature to see if there was any evidence of recurrent seizures after eclampsia, which made me feel informed. Just before the six month period ended I re-applied for my licence. My medical team was helpful and supportive in my re-application and responded promptly to the DVLA's request for further information.

Having my licence revoked came as a complete shock. I wish my healthcare team or GP had let me know that the revocation was a possibility either on discharge from hospital or when I attended my follow-up appointments. If I had had warning that I might lose my licence, I could have made some alternative arrangements or put in place a back-up plan.

The DVLA website provides a lot of helpful information, including the indications for having your licence revoked and how long for, so sharing this resource with patients can help them understand the process and prepare for any decisions.

What you need to know

- Informing patients who have had a seizure, or any other medical event, that they may have their driving licence revoked can help them prepare for this. Knowing the DVLA process for surrendering and re-applying for a licence can also be helpful
- Where possible, copy your patient into any correspondence with the DVLA so that they are kept updated
- Some patients must not drive while waiting for a decision from the DVLA, and patients can re-apply for their licence up to eight weeks before the period of revocation ends. The DVLA website provides detailed guidance on this for patients and health professionals

Education into practice

Where can you find the most up-to-date information on DVLA guidance for your patients?

What information could you give to patients to help them prepare in case they have their driving licence revoked?

How could you help support patients who have had their driving licence removed for medical reasons?

Further information

Advice from the DVLA's medical advisers, either in general, or relating to a particular driver, may be obtained by medical professionals by phone (01792 782337) or email (medadviser@dvla.gov.uk).

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neurological-disorders-assessing-fitness-to-drive>

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