

SURVEY OF DRIVING HABITS AND ASSESSMENT OF RISK IN DIALYSIS PATIENTS

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Driving is a complex activity requiring high-level cognitive skills (memory, visual processing and attention) and executive skills to coordinate and direct motor function. While guidelines exist in medical literature to assess an individual's ability to drive with cardiac, neurological, visual and cognitive abnormalities, no such guidelines are available for patients of chronic kidney disease and those receiving dialysis. There are no studies that have investigated the relationship between chronic renal failure and risk of motor vehicle crashes.

We designed a survey to subjectively query patients undergoing dialysis at local dialysis units about driving and associated conditions. The survey questionnaire included medical and driving history and the "Am I a Safe Driver" from the AMA/National Highway Traffic Safety Admn (2003).

A total of 186 patients participated in the survey. Mean age was 67.8 years (55.4 % males, 44.6 % females). 86.4% were on intermittent hemodialysis. 106 reported driving presently. 92% of those who were driving reported feeling comfortable while driving. However, of all those who reported feeling comfortable with driving, 26% reported dizziness and 31% weakness after dialysis. 4.4% had a history of fainting after dialysis and 24 % had documented episodes of hypoglycemia. 44% patients had loud snoring though only 12 % had a diagnosis of sleep apnea. Further 5.6% patients had history of falling asleep while driving. 32% of them had some accident history. Of all those who had a history of accidents 37.7% were on sedatives, 55.7% on beta-blockers, 37% were on hypoglycemics and 24% on narcotics.

The information obtained stresses the need for development of guidelines for assessing safety of driving in dialysis patients. Options for ensuring safe driving in these patients will be presented, including our questionnaire, occupational therapy evaluation, and a driving test.