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## COMMUNITY

# Senior drivers presented with a host challenges

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and they usually go without preparing for what is on that test, so they're going blind into a specific test of their driving, which is knowledge and skills."

Black says many seniors may not know that they can fail the test for seemingly small or insignificant factors, such as not using their parking brake.

Black offers courses for senior drivers to provide them with an education on the way driving tests have changed over the years and to make them aware of the instances that would require them to take a road test.

Glen Williams resident Eva Murdock, 79, says she has a close friend who recently had his licence revoked.

"It was a horror story for him," she said. "He had to take a driving test. He's a good driver, he's been driving for years, and they failed him. He had had a stroke and he was mobile, but they didn't think his cognitive skills were quick enough."

According to data obtained from the Halton Regional Police Service from March 2017 to March 2018, among all accidents involving seniors (ages 65 years and older), there have been 20.8 collisions per 1,000 people.

The annual Halton Regional Police Service report for 2017 cites 9,261 reported

motor vehicle collisions in total, which means that for Halton residents of driving age (using available census population data for residents ages 15 and up), the collision rate is almost at par with that of solely seniors at 20.9 accidents per 1,000 people.

Sandra Letarnec, 75, chose to retire from driving seven years ago after a serious accident (of which she was found to be not at fault) left her hospital-ridden and unable to stand for months.

"The accident I was in, it wasn't my fault, the other driver was doing twice the speed limit when he came and T-boned me," she said. "I was on my way to watch my little grandson in his first school concert. Next thing, I woke up in the hospital. It's a bit of a shock to your system."

Letarnec said she feels that many people have a preconceived notion about senior drivers that can often lead to bias when it comes to accidents involving seniors.

"You're prejudged because of the colour of your hair," she said. "If there's a 30-year-old and a 70-year-old in an accident, automatically they blame the senior until tests are done."

Georgetown physician and Ontario Medical Association president Nadia Alam says speaking to senior patients about whether or not it would be appropriate to retire from driving is quite common,

and a subject that all family doctors should broach at some point.

"As people get older they do get slower and it's physically slower, either through arthritis or a physical disease like that, or it could be mentally slower, either through just plain old forgetfulness versus something more progressive like dementia. Naturally, as the human body ages, your reflexes get slower, your thinking gets slower, and at some point, it becomes a safety issue."

Alam says most of the patients she has had this conversation with have recognized the signs themselves or have had family members who expressed concern.

"This is something that seniors should prepare for as they prepare for everything else that changes in their life as they get older," she said.

However, she adds, making the decision to quit driving is one that can be bitter-sweet for seniors, and it is important to subsequently speak about how patients can still maintain their independence and continue to do the things they enjoy.

Alam says though Georgetown does not currently have a public transit system, it does offer a whole host of transportation alternatives for seniors, including ActiVan and CASHh.

A full list of resources can be found at <http://www.halton.ca/cms/One>.

## ON NOW AT THE BRICK!