



Medical Board of California Newsletter

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Expert Reviewer Training Underway



Photo by Charlotte Clark

**By Christina Delp,
Chief of Enforcement**

The Medical Board of California (Board) kicked off its first expert reviewer training event for the year on March 19, 2016, at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine. This one-day training is recommended for physicians who meet the expert reviewer criteria and have been approved by the Board. An expert reviewer, based on his or her education, training, skills and experience, reviews quality of care complaints to evaluate whether a physician (respondent) provided the appropriate standard of care to health care consumers. Expert reviewers are neither advocates for the Board nor advocates for the respondent physician. They are impartial, objective reviewers required to prepare reports that are reviewed by Board or Division of Investigation staff and legal representatives from the Office of the Attorney General to determine if disciplinary action should be pursued against the respondent physician for violating the Medical Practice Act. Over 1,000 physicians are on the Board-approved expert reviewer list.

"We always need more expert reviewers," said Executive Director Kimberly Kirchmeyer. "They are vital to the case review and enforcement process. An expert reviewer's opinion, and, if necessary, his or her testimony, is vital to determining

Expert Reviewer Training (continued on page 4)



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The Mission of the Medical Board of California

The mission of the Medical Board of California is to protect health care consumers through the proper licensing and regulation of physicians and surgeons and certain allied health care professions and through the vigorous, objective enforcement of the Medical Practice Act, and to promote access to quality medical care through the Board's licensing and regulatory functions.

Prescribing Practices to Promote Driving Safety

By Linda Hill, M.D., M.P.H.

Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death in the U.S. and resulted in 32,675 fatalities in 2014. It is unknown how many of these crashes involved drivers using prescription drugs, but we do know that prescription and over-the-counter medications have the potential to interfere with the ability to drive safely, and the risk increases with the number of medications taken.

The potential for impaired driving due to medication can occur at any age, though older adults may be more susceptible to inherent drug interactions. The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety reports

that two-thirds of drivers over age 65 take five or more daily medications that can affect their ability to drive safely. Yet studies have found that health practitioners are generally unaware of the medical effects on driving and are reluctant to discuss them with patients.

The main side effects that impair driving skills include drowsiness, confusion, hypotension and possible associated syncope, hypoglycemia, poor muscle tone or incoordination. Less common are double vision, nausea, and blurred vision. While almost all classes of drugs include at least some with the potential for driving-impairing side effects, the worst offenders include narcotic analgesics, anxiolytics, anticonvulsants, antipsychotics, somniacs, hypoglycemics, chemotherapeutics, and even antihistamines.



The risk-benefit ratio for treating conditions, including the manifestation of diseases versus the side effects of medications on the safety of driving, is always important to consider. For example, depression increases the risk of a crash twofold, while antidepressants increase the crash risk 40%.

Physicians and pharmacists should counsel patients about the effects of their medications on driving ability, use the minimal effective doses in prescribing, and avoid the worse offending agents where possible. The discussion should include the influence of alcohol and other substances on driving, including their ability to potentiate the effects of prescription medication.

The Training, Research and Education for Driving Safety (TREDIS) program at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) has developed an easy-to-use "[Medications and Driving](#)" pocket guide to assist clinicians in the management of medications that can affect driving. It highlights ten classes of drugs with potential driving-related side effects and includes the identification of the least and most offending medications in each class to guide prescription choices if the patient is driving. These pocket guides are available free of charge: contact TREDIS at the [TREDIS website](#) or call (858) 534-9330.

(Dr. Hill, the director of TREDIS, is a professor at UCSD and directs the Preventive Medical Residency Program at the UCSD School of Medicine, Department of Family Medicine and Public Health.)