

A new car-free life: The need for dementia-patients to return their driving licenses

Mitsuyasu Kanai, Yoko Hirata, Yuko Shimazaki, Saaya Yokota, Eiko Morita, Mitsuko Osaki, Ban Mihara

[Objectives] In Japan, people aged 75 or above who wish to have their driver's license renewed will have to submit a medical certificate to determine whether they fall in the first category during a preliminary inspection. An investigation of the situation is required if a subject belonging to the first category requires medical approval.

[Methods] The subjects were 70 patients who visited our center for dementia-related diseases between June 2019 and May 2020, and needed to renew their driver's license. The patients were subject to neuropsychological tests, electroencephalography, and brain imaging (magnetic resonance imaging and single-photon emission computed tomography).

[Results] Dementia was diagnosed in 32 individuals, Alzheimer's disease in 22, vascular dementia in 5, mixed dementia in 2, frontotemporal lobar degeneration in 2, and dementia with Lewy bodies in 1. Thirty patients had mild cognitive impairment (MCI), of whom seven revisited 6 months later, and two progressed to Alzheimer's disease. Some patients diagnosed with dementia responded positively to the recommendation of voluntarily returning their driver's licenses. However, some patients wished to retain their driver's licenses despite the diagnosis of dementia.

[Conclusions] It is necessary to take measures to provide support to people with dementia, so that they do not experience a deterioration in their quality of life after they stop driving. Particularly, patients diagnosed with MCI need early consideration, and they should return their driver's licenses. It is important for such patients to start preparing for a car-free life before the onset of cognitive decline.