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### **Driving and Epilepsy in the European Union Toward harmonization of legislation and guidelines for the neurologists (A position paper from the European Board of Neurology)**

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the European Board of Neurology / UEMS Section of Neurology*

Driving a car is not considered today a luxury but a necessity for every day living, working and entertainment. On the other hand road traffic accidents resulting in deaths and serious injuries have become an epidemic in European and other countries.

Epilepsy and seizures have been shown in many studies to be the cause of increased rates of traffic accidents (1-7). This is not, however, true in the case of patients in remission (with or without medication) that has been found convincingly to decrease the risk of such accidents to almost that of the general population (8, 9).

Complete ban of driving for epileptics was the rule till a few decades ago. Since then European and other countries have gradually introduced more liberal legislation based only on limited scientific data of the existing risk (3,10).

This legislation varies in different countries of the European Union as indicated in our recent survey (11). There is even a very small number of countries that still bans driving for life for epileptics in spite of the existing European Council directive 91/439/EEC that allows licensing when certain requirements are met such as absence of seizures in the last two years (12).

The Advisory Board to the Driving Licence Committee of the European Union has prepared and publicized the rules and guidelines that will harmonize the legislation on epilepsy and driving in all member countries, a summary of which appears in Tables 8 and 9 of their final report (13).



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In an effort to help with this harmonization the European Board of Neurology (EBN)/UEMS-SEN in its meeting that took place in Limassol, Cyprus on 11 March 2006 invited the chairman of the Advisory Board Dr. Eric Schmedding who gave a detailed account of the guidelines. After an exhaustive and fruitful discussion of their background and scientific basis the EBN unanimously approved those guidelines.

Some of the main changes from the existing European Council directive are the following :

- Drivers or applicants can be declared fit to drive after 1-year period free of further seizures.
- Drivers and applicants who have had seizures exclusively during sleep or without loss of consciousness can be declared fit to drive provided that this pattern has been established for a period of at least a year.
- Drivers or applicants for public transportation etc. (Group 2) can be declared fit to drive 10 years after freedom from further seizures without the aid of antiepileptic drugs.
- The patient's specific epilepsy syndrome and seizure type should be identified and evaluated by a neurologist.

We would like to stress that in deciding to support "liberalization" of the legislation on driving and epilepsy we had in mind the following:

1. Many surveys have indicated serious underreporting of seizures by the patients, which is higher the more restrictive the law, resulting in illegal driving and inadequate treatment (14, 15).
2. Striking a balance between the increased risks when driving, against the social, psychological and vocational disadvantages of prohibition in epileptics should be the target.

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