

Driving & Dementia

By: Amy Sobrino, MSW

For the past two months, I have been tracked. Everywhere I go in my car, every turn I make, every road I drive, has been logged. Does this sound like something out of a spy movie? Perhaps, but it is also telling the story of how technology is continuing to impact our world, even the world of dementia caregiving.

From the moment we turn sixteen years old, driving is often the ticket to independence. Freedom to drive to your choice of destination is empowering and liberating, especially as a teenager. As an adult, driving is often a necessity, used for work, shopping, traveling, and everything in between. As we age, however, there are often reasons that driving may become a little challenging. Vision problems such as macular degeneration or physical weakness from a stroke are common reasons it may be difficult for a person to drive successfully. Another is dementia. Many people think of memory loss as the only symptom of dementia, especially Alzheimer's type. While memory loss is a primary symptom, it's also helpful to think of dementia as a processing disorder. How a person understands the world is changing rapidly because of the damage occurring in their brain. Sights, smells, depth perception, judgment...over time, more and more damage occurs. The act of driving combines these skills into one dangerous package. For many of the clients I work with, driving impairment is often one of the beginning signs of dementia. Many families want their loved one to remain as independent as possible, but also as safe as possible. This desire for independence and safety can sometimes be conflicting, especially in the realm of driving. Many families ask "What are the options to know how my loved one is driving?" Beyond a formal driving evaluation, new technology has been developed to fit this need.

Enter MotoSafety, the name of the device that has been tracking my car for the past two months. Originally developed for teenage drivers, the company has also found that they have a specific market for older adults who may be experiencing some challenges with driving. MotoSafety is a simple plug in that goes underneath the steering wheel of most cars (if you have an older model, they can still install it). Once plugged in, the device uses GPS to give an exact location and also monitors driving habits (acceleration, braking, and speeding). A person could set a certain radius and know exactly when their loved one drives outside of that perimeter. Although this won't be a permanent solution (a progressive dementia like Alzheimer's eventually ends a person's driving ability), it can help families keep their loved one's independence as long as possible. And if new technology like MotoSafety is available, it might be the answer to this common issue.

For more information about Memory Moment articles & Effingham Area Alzheimer's Awareness, check out their website at www.effinghamalz.org. If you are a caregiver & have specific questions or situations you would like information on, please feel free to call Shannon Nobsch at 217-663-0010 or Amy Sobrino at 618-363-8372.