

P R E F A C E

“Driving with Confidence” is not just a catchy title for a book; it is a statement of empowerment. The message is simple: In many cases, persons with low vision conditions can and do receive, retain and exercise their driving privileges, safely, and on a daily basis. Though simple, this message is far from being broadly understood or accepted — in fact, it is quite controversial. This book sheds factual light on the controversy.

America is aging, bringing more and more people into the age group where they have to cope with age-related eye conditions that may interfere with their ability to drive. At the same time, it is these very same new golden-agers who rely and depend on the mobility and freedom provided by driving. “If I was denied driving, I would be furious,” says M. S., a low vision driver from New Hampshire. “We live in the country, and if I couldn’t drive, I’d be trapped at home.”

Many persons with low vision conditions, and even more importantly, many driver licensing authorities, are coming to the

realization that driving with low vision is a viable option that should be examined and whenever possible and **safe**, encouraged as another way to enhance and preserve our lifestyle and to exercise our independence. In many states, low vision is no longer a condition that should or could lead to automatic disqualification from driving a car.

Empirical test results could not be clearer: “Students who completed training perform at a level comparable to that of their normally sighted counterparts in terms of basic visual skills in vehicle handling and ability to react to traffic hazards” (Huss, 1996).

Yet, in as many as 20 states, low vision is still a cause for almost certain denial of driving privileges.

This book, co-authored by one of the country’s leading low vision rehabilitation experts, contains facts, information, advice and reference materials that will enable those facing a deterioration in their vision to start answering the daunting question: “Is it practical and safe for me to continue driving?” “Driving with Confidence” is also aimed at informing those of us who come in contact with persons with low vision — family members, friends, eye-care professionals, and licensing agency administrators.

A primary mission of this book is to explain that a diagnosis of visual impairment should by no means lead to an automatic decision to give up driving. The proper way to determine fitness to drive is a combination of the assessment of vision disability and the compensatory adaptations as they affect the driving performance of the driver.

Preface

“Driving with Confidence” will help you understand your condition, and give you the tools necessary to evaluate your chances of driving safely with impaired vision. We have gathered here a simplified yet comprehensive description of the typical problems faced by drivers with deteriorating vision. We have evaluated the aspects of visual performance needed to ensure safe driving and the visual problems associated with the more common eye diseases.

If you decide to pursue a low vision driver’s license “Driving with Confidence” provides structured, practical advice on how to go about resuming or maintaining driving privileges. The book reviews relevant state and federal vision-related licensing regulations, and points the reader to available resources and support services.

At the same time, it is crucial to emphasize that in the first place, it is you, the individual, who must decide whether your days at the wheel are over. This book will help in making this decision an informed one, based on knowledge rather than fear or speculation. If the decision is to quit driving, this book will provide you with specific information on how to organize and finance your transportation needs without a car.

Much of the information on licensing requirements and low vision counseling which you will find in this book is not easily available in one place and in a coherent format and language. We have painstakingly gathered information on vision requirements set by each state’s Motor Vehicle Bureau to provide cogent summaries that will be helpful not only to patients, but to ophthalmologists,

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optometrists, driving instructors, DMV administrators and other specialized professionals who care for and provide services associated with driving and low vision.

And finally, we wish to stress, as we shall do throughout the book, that safety — the public's and the driver's — should always be the overriding consideration in every decision and action relating to driving, and that all low-vision driving-related decisions should be taken only in accordance with local rules and regulations, and only after consultation with and approval by the proper authorities.