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A specialized driver assessment service for people with mental illness in Hong Kong

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Introduction

Driving skill signifies independent community mobility and is a core skill of commercial driver. Drivers with mental illness experience functional difficulties in biomechanical, sensory-motor, cognitive and psycho-social aspects, and often demonstrate problems in planning and judgement, motor control, reaction time, selective attention and risk-taking behaviours during driving. Literatures reveal that their risks of vehicle accidents are two to five times than those without mental illness. In 2014 statistics by the Transport Department, 50 vehicle accidents were related to drivers with mental illness or substance abuse. Public concern on how to identify this risky driver group has arisen. To address this eminent need, a specialized driver assessment service is developed to cater their unique characteristics and to provide objective data to doctors. Work rehabilitation as a driver can thus be facilitated.

Objectives

To establish a specialized driver assessment service for people with mental illness in Hong Kong.

Methodology

Stage 1: Specialized training Six Occupational Therapists (OT) completed training programme at Sydney and certified as driver trained OT. Stage 2: Conceptualization Service framework was developed with structured driver assessment that includes: - Assessment on potential functional difficulties of clients on driving through obtaining detailed driving history and screening on physical, visual, perception and cognitive ability. - Assessment on clients' driving skills, risk-taking behaviours, social-related driving behaviours and hazard perception under a safe and controlled driving environment provided by driving simulator. Stage 3: Pilot testing

Result

Six clients who used to be commercial drivers were recruited in pilot testing, in which 50% were diagnosed as Schizophrenia while the others as mood disorder. One client demonstrated no significant deficits in driving skills. Two clients were recommended

further training to improve their driving capacity and habits. Three clients displayed marked cognitive deficits leading to significant judgement error and risk-taking behaviour, and they were not recommended to resume driving at the moment. In conclusion, this specialized driver assessment could help to identify risky driver group by assessing the functional difficulties in driving. Researches on driver assessment and further development on driving counselling and vocational resettlement programmes for this group are highly recommended.