Asperger’s Syndrome:

The implication on driver training methods & road safety

Sue Tyler
Highlands Drive Safe
"After all, the really social people did not invent the first stone spear. It was probably invented by an Aspie who chipped away at rocks while the other people socialized around the campfire. Without autism traits we might still be living in caves"

Temple Grandin.
Aspergers is prevalent in 62:10,000 in the population  (McDermott, et al, 2006)

Autism is prevalent in 2.6% of the population  (Young Shin Kim et al, 2011)

- IQ above 70
- Early speech onset
- Impairment in social interaction
- Failure to develop peer relationships
- Restricted repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests and activities
- Often have other issues i.e depression, anxiety, ADD
<table>
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<th>Case studies</th>
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<tr>
<td>James</td>
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|                            |
| Simon                      |
| Male, 26 yrs               |
|Aspergers, Anxiety, depression |
|Self medicates              |
|Not reported                |
|Passed L test one attempt    |
Case studies

John
- Male, 20 yrs
- Aspergers, ADHD, depression, suicidal tendencies
- Medicated
- Not reported until RTA test
- Passed L test one attempt
- Passed P1 test 100% first attempt

Jack
- Male, 18 yrs
- Aspergers, dyspraxia
- Medicated
- Reported to RTA
- Passed L test one attempt
- Passed P1 test first attempt over 95%
Characteristics of Asperger’s

- Find social situations hard
- Find it hard making small talk
- Literal thinker, inflexible
- Repetitive routines
- Stress when routine suddenly changes
- Lack of empathy
- Hard to read social cues
- Very narrow topics of interests
- Highly logical thinking, eye for detail
- Normal to above average intelligence
Educational Issues

- Understanding the individual needs of the student with AS
- Structure and routine
- Use of diagrams
- Teaching predicting skills
- Set key words and sequences
- Sensitivities
- Misunderstandings
Medical conditions generally not declared
Resulting in poor communication and dangerous situations with students
Unpredictability of student responses and actions
Handling emotional outbursts or stress situations
Dangers of misinterpretation whilst on road
Teaching transference of knowledge
RMS Testing Procedures (NSW)

- Current learner requirements – 120 hours (includes 20 actual night hours)
- 12 month learner period for 16 – 24yrs (no time/hour restriction for over 25 yrs)
- If a diagnosed medical condition is recognised in AUSROADS Fitness to Drive a learner must declare on the Application for licence form and have their Doctor complete a medical form.
Issues for RMS (RTA)

- Learners and carers not declaring medical conditions or medication use
- Learners use of medication to ‘balance’ up for test day
- Misunderstanding of instructions given by RMS testing officer
- Taking instructions literally
- Stress point – handling reactions
- Effect of medications (or lack of) on driving
7 Neurological Condition
No ☐ Yes ☐
If No proceed to the next question. If Yes complete the following.

Cognitive and/or Intellectual Impairments ☐ Yes ☐
Dementia ☐ Yes ☐
Traumatic Brain Injury ☐ Yes ☐

8 Sleep Disorder
No ☐ Yes ☐
If No proceed to the next question. If Yes complete the following.
Sleep Apnoea No ☐ Yes ☐
Narcolepsy No ☐ Yes ☐
Well controlled No ☐ Yes ☐

9 Mental Health/Nervous Disorder
eg. psychotic state, depression, schizophrenia.
No ☐ Yes ☐

10 Drugs likely to affect driving
No ☐ Yes ☐
If Yes complete the following.
Non-prescribed drugs ☐ Yes ☐
Indication of alcohol abuse ☐ Yes ☐

Comments on any condition likely to affect driving. Append additional pages if necessary.
Further study needed of drivers with AS, the effect of medication and the training methods used.
Support strategies to be introduced for new and existing drivers with AS or special needs.
Medical testing and clearance for ALL drivers to screen for undisclosed medical issues that may effect road safety.
Training for all RMS staff involved in driver testing for special needs clients.