Driving after Traumatic Brain Injury
by Lauren E. Adler, Attorney at Law

Driving is a freedom that many of us take for granted, but it can be an integral part of an individual’s sense of autonomy and independence. Survivors of traumatic brain injury (TBI) are no different; in fact, the ability to drive can be a critical piece of a TBI survivor’s re-integration into the community and re-engagement in activities of daily living. Between 40 and 60 percent of TBI survivors return to driving. But for many folks who have suffered a TBI, getting behind the wheel may not be so simple.

Brain injuries are not alike from one person to the next. Whether the TBI is categorized or labeled as “mild,” “moderate” or “severe” by the treating health professionals, some TBI survivors battle residual difficulties with headaches, visual disturbance, balance dysfunction, spatial reasoning and motor deficits that can significantly affect that person’s ability to operate a motor vehicle. In order to safely return to the road, the person’s vision (central, peripheral, spatial), reaction time, and judgment must be functioning adequately so as not to endanger themselves or others.

The decision of whether or when a TBI survivor who has suffered such impairments should return to driving is an important one, and should be discussed by the injured person, family members, and the treating provider team. If you have concerns about your patient getting behind the wheel but you do not raise the issue, the patient and family members may assume that this means the person can drive safely and without concern. As a result, if you do have concerns about your patient returning to the road prematurely, it is important to communicate this to your patient and the patient’s family and encourage them to wait until further recovery is achieved.

If you are unsure about your patient’s safety on the road, it may be prudent to suggest a driving evaluation. Research shows that many TBI survivors are not thoroughly evaluated before returning to the road, putting them and others on the roadway at higher risk to crash. A professional driving evaluation reduces that risk tremendously. Driving evaluations are often two-tiered. The first part examines a driver’s cognitive function, such as decision-making skills and reaction time. The second part involves an on-the-road test that simulates various driving situations and assesses the driver’s operation of the vehicle in real time.2 A driving evaluation can also determine whether the patient’s driving impairment is episodic or persistent, and whether your patient merely needs some re-training, or adaptive equipment to add to the vehicle, such as hand-controlled gas and brake systems, spinner knobs for steering, a left foot accelerator, or lifts for entering or exiting the vehicle.

A comprehensive driver re-training program specifically geared to helping folks that have suffered a neurocognitive injury is available if necessary through the University of Washington.3

Also, driving evaluations by certified professionals are widely available through national organizations such as the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists,4 or local organizations such as Harbor Speech Pathology.5

Hiking Safety

There are roughly 3,375 trails in the state of Washington, according to the Washington Trails Association and many are well maintained and easy to follow, but not all of them. Before exploring Washington’s great outdoors, it is best to be prepared—even the most experienced hikers can stray from the main trail and get into harm’s way.

Hikers’ resources and guides recommend various essentials to pack along for the hike, from sunscreen to GPS trackers.

Here is a list of the 10 most recommended essentials for every hiker’s backpack:
1. Map of hiking region
2. Compass or GPS tracker
3. Warm clothing
4. Rain/wind jacket & pants
5. Extra food and water
6. Flashlight or headlamp
7. Matches/Fire-starter
8. First aid kit and sunscreen
9. Whistle
10. Pocket knife

Some of these items may seem unnecessary or outdated, especially with the many location apps on smart phones. However, many hiking locations have limited cellular or Wi-Fi service. It is wise to have a good back up plan in case you cannot access your phone data for whatever reason.

The National Parks Services recommend a few steps one can take before and during any hiking excursion, conveniently described by the acronym HIKE SAFE.

Have a plan
Inform someone of where you’re going and when you plan to return
Keep a flashlight and whistle with you
Eat well, stay hydrated: carry plenty of water
Stay on the trail
Ask for HELP!
Familiarize yourself with the area, use a map
Expect changes in the weather

For more information on hiking in Washington, including trail listings, visit www.wta.org.

1 www.hikesafe.com
2 www.nps.gov/plansurvisits/hikingsafety
**March 28, 2015** Steven J. Anglés was an invited speaker at the Washington State Chiropractic Association’s Dr. Dan Dock seminar on documentation of injuries in Renton, WA.

**April 15, 2015** Mr. Adler was a keynote speaker at the annual conference for the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine in Hollywood, Florida on the implementation of concussion safety protocol for team physicians and the importance of understanding traumatic brain injuries in children.

**April 23-24, 2015** The attorneys of Adler • Giersch ps attended the American Massage Therapy Association’s Annual Convention in Tacoma, WA. Richard H. Adler covered the importance of massage therapy in the rehabilitation of injuries during the “Kick Start” program for newly licensed and soon-to-be-licensed massage therapists.

**April 25, 2015** Richard H. Adler was an invited speaker to the OrthEd Symposium Integrating the Management of Whiplash Associated Disorders at North Seattle College.

**May 12, 2015** Richard H. Adler joined physical therapists at Harborview Outpatient Physical Therapy for an in-service presentation on proper documentation needs for patients, providers, and insurers involved in a personal injury case.

**May 14, 2016** Melissa D. Carter and Richard H. Adler met with all therapists at Olympic Physical Therapy’s office at Cabrini Tower in Seattle to discuss medical-legal principles in understanding pre-existing conditions and subsequent trauma.

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**Kristin Cruse**

**Practice Development Coordinator**

Kristin Cruse started working at the law firm of Adler • Giersch ps in December 2002 and has developed into a key member of the firm. She coordinates and manages practice development events including community outreach and volunteer events, organizing educational seminars in the health care and legal communities, publishing the firm’s monthly Advocate newsletter for medical providers and the quarterly Perspectives newsletter for our clients and community partners, maintaining social media and online presentations, and overseeing the firm’s data management. Kristin received her Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Washington in 2009 while working full time at the law firm. Outside of Adler • Giersch ps, Kristin is very active with the Brain Injury Alliance of Washington (BIAWA), where she has served as a board member since 2004. Currently, she is Secretary of the BIAWA’s Executive Board. As a board member, Kristin has also served as Chair of the Annual Fundraising Gala. Kristin’s community work has also led her to take on significant roles in cancer awareness and prevention and has served as team captain for the Susan G. Komen 3 Day Walk (60 miles in 3 days), organizing and encouraging her team to reach their training and fundraising goals. She also participates in various walk/run fundraising events in the Seattle area for MADD, Relay for Life, BIAWA, Suicide Prevention, and the St. Patrick’s Day Dash.

Kristin is an avid sports fan. She is a Seahawks Season Ticket Holder, and attends at least one Mariners game per home stand. She can be seen at Rat City Roller Girl bouts and Sounders matches and, in the event Seattle ever gets an NHL team, she plans to be a hockey season ticket holder, too. Kristin resides in West Seattle with her partner, Scott. On the weekends she enjoys trips to Pike Place Market in the early morning, live music, working around the house, yoga, hiking, and checking out the Northwest’s best nano and microbreweries.

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**Scott and Kristin at the Brain Injury Alliance of Washington Gala with the Seahawks Super Bowl Trophy.**

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**ADLER • GIEERSCH PS SPOTLIGHT:**

**Kristin Cruse, Practice Development Coordinator**

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**Purpose:**

To promote public awareness of insurance issues, victim’s rights, health care treatment of choice and safety on the roadway.

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**May 16, 2015** The attorneys at Adler • Giersch ps partnered with Center for Diagnostic Imaging to present a Mock Trial on Whiplash, Radiology, and the Personal Injury Case at the University of Washington School of Law.