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Driving disoriented is just as dangerous as being impaired behind the wheel. And it's a problem police are seeing more of among seniors on our city streets and highways.

"With wrong-way drivers, it's either an elderly, disoriented driver or an impaired driver involved," said Const. George Silvestri of Barrie OPP.

"Disoriented drivers, they're usually over 50 years old."

That was the case for an elderly man driving the wrong way on Highway 400 from Highway 88 yesterday.

The man was seen driving south in the northbound lane with no lights on around 1:15 a.m., and had no idea where he was when stopped by OPP.

"He was extremely disoriented," said OPP Sgt. Cam Woolley.

"He appeared to be suffering from some kind of dementia."

The issue of wrong-way driving seniors has officers like Woolley worried.

"This issue has to be addressed," Woolley said.

"We have an aging population, and I think we'll start seeing more of this happening."

No motorists were injured in yesterday's incident, but that outcome was one Woolley calls lucky.

"This could have been a more serious situation," Woolley said.

"That why we're hoping family members will start stepping in if they see a parent, or grandparents, starting to drive poorly."

Embarrassment and fear of hurt feelings often keep families from intervening with a family member's bad driving habits.

"Families are often reluctant to step forward to take that person away from driving," Woolley said. "A lot of people don't want to deal with it, especially if that person has a mental or medical condition."

But hope is not lost for all senior drivers. Senior-gearred programs and driving schools offer instruction and tips to help senior motorist sharpen their skills.

Driver training companies like Young Drivers of Canada invite seniors to take a few driving lessons.

"If a senior needs to take a road test, we'll give them brush-up lessons," said Barb Webster of Young Drivers, adding she wished they offered a separate course for seniors. "It would be great if seniors had to participate in a class to drive more often, but you can't force them to take one."

Barrie police also offer the 55 Alive program for seniors.

"It's a driving program offered through our communications unit," said Sgt. Dave Goodbrand. "It's great for seniors who are worried about some aspect of their driving, and helps them correct areas they aren't strong in."

It's also a way for police to pick out potentially dangerous senior drivers.

"If anyone's standing out as having real driving issues, we can approach them about it," Goodbrand said. "We can suggest they maybe shouldn't be driving any longer."

Taking a computerized cruise is another way seniors can test their motor skills. DriveWise, in Barrie's south end, uses a simulator to keep drivers in check.

"Seniors use the simulator to baseline their skills," said Lesley de Repentigny, CEO of DriveWise Barrie. "The simulator puts them through intersection scanning, and learning to react to different situations."

A four-hour course with the simulator will cost you \$159. A small price to pay for piece of mind.

"We'll give them an honest assessment from the simulator, telling them if they maybe shouldn't consider driving anymore," De

Repentigny said.

If taking a public course seems too intimidating, CAA offers the Roadwise driving DVD.

“It’s geared toward seniors, taking them through a series of (mental and physical) tests,” said Edyta Zdancewicz of the CAA. “It’s run through a computer, so they can do the training from home, not out in public.”

The DVD offers brake training, checking for blind spots, and reacting to items popping up at you while driving. The disc costs \$20 and can be purchased through local CAA stores.

Without receiving help, some seniors run the risk of losing their licence to their unsafe driving habits. That’s something Woolley is considering for the elderly man stopped yesterday on Highway 400.

“We’ll be recommending a medical licence review for that man with the Ministry of Transportation,” he said.