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Dear Julie,

Today marks the five-year anniversary of the Association of Optometrists (AOP) first calling for action by Government and its institutions to reduce the preventable scandal of deaths on our roads caused by the weaknesses in our driving and eyesight regulations.

As you know, approaching 3000 people a year die in accidents caused by motorists whose eyesight is below the legal standard for driving on our roads. This statistic is neither new nor surprising: deaths have continued at that level for many years. It is well-evidenced that a substantial proportion of drivers have inadequate eyesight or eyewear. For example, a recent survey of over 1000 optometrists revealed that nearly half of them had in the past month seen a patient whose eyesight was below the required standard but who were determined to continue to drive.

The AOP has been drawing attention to this appalling annual death toll for five years now. However, scandalously, there has been no Government action in response. What makes the position more dreadful is that there is an obvious – and simple – solution. The laws governing eyesight and driving in the UK are among the laxest in Europe, requiring merely that the driver demonstrates adequate vision at the point when he or she first takes a driving test. We are calling for the UK to adopt the practice of most of our European peers and make it mandatory for drivers periodically to demonstrate that an eyecare professional has certified their eyesight as adequate. We would suggest that a testing interval of ten years would be appropriate, with a lesser period applying in the case of drivers over 70.

We recognise that this would require legislative change. However, as the key Government agency involved in this area, we are asking for your support. You make clear the penalties for not reporting a medical condition, but is there scope for you to give more information? For example to specify the dangers involved in driving with poor uncorrected eyesight, or the health benefits of getting a sight test. Is this something that you cover when you write to drivers who are approaching their 70th birthdays, or is that letter merely an administrative reminder of the need to renew their licence?

In addition, we are asking you to consider whether there are any administrative measures which you are able to take within the existing legislative framework – for example in relation to the self-certification of drivers aged over 70 – to address the more egregious elements of eyesight risk. If however there are obstacles here which render such moves problematic, we would be grateful for your feedback about what they may be so that we can consider how they may be overcome.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adam Sampson".

Adam Sampson
Chief Executive