



National Transportation Safety Board Safety Recommendations

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency with the missions of determining the probable cause of all aviation accidents and significant accidents in other modes of transportation and promoting transportation safety. Why is the NTSB in a Board of Medical Practice Newsletter? It's because of the profound affect that controlled substances, other prescription drugs and health conditions can have on the ability to safely operate aircraft and other vehicles in transportation, which prompted a request to all state licensing boards that license prescribers to request assistance in getting the word out about some NTSB Safety Recommendations.

[NTSB Safety Recommendations I-14-1 and I-14-2](#) are directed at medical and pharmacy licensing boards, calling on them to take two actions.

One is to include in guidelines on prescribing controlled substances for pain the recommendation for health care professionals to discuss with patients the effect that medical conditions and medication use may have on ability to safely operate a vehicle in any mode of transportation. The second recommendation calls for use of newsletter announcements and other communications to health care professionals and pharmacists to promote the practice of routinely discussing those risks with patients.

Since 2005, the Board of Medical Practice policies on prescribing opioids for chronic

pain have called for use of an informed consent with patients that includes a warning that extreme caution must be used while driving or operating potentially harmful machinery. The 2014 update to the guidelines offers the recommendation that informed consent have a warning about the risk of impaired motor skills affecting driving and other tasks.

As self-evident as the warnings suggested by the NTSB may seem, it is important to provide them to patients who often may not fully appreciate the degree to which they may be impaired by a medical condition and controlled substances. In its announcement of these recommendations, the NTSB cited a 2014 safety study that found a surprisingly high percentage of pilots who were involved in fatal accidents during 1990-2012 were using one or more controlled substances that could cause impairment at the time of the accident.

Most medical professionals who prescribe probably already have incorporated warnings such as these for all patients whose conditions or treatment may affect their ability to do tasks of daily living safely, but this is an important reminder that a few words and seconds during a patient encounter can go a long way toward making your patients and all who encounter them safer.

For more information: <http://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-recs/reclatters/I-14-001-002.pdf>