Categorisation of Medicinal Drugs Related to Their Effects on Driving, From Prevention to Regulation

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Following a request from the French Road Safety Council (Prevention Routière), and with the help of the French Federation of Insurance Companies, The CERMT gave in 2000 a report on the categorisation of medicinal drugs regarding to driving fitness. This report was presented to the French Ministries of Health and of Transportation, and was also proposed to the European Commission and to the European Council.

It is based on a four level categorisation, linked with the two groups of driving licences existing in Europe.

The Class 0 concerns the drugs which have no demonstrated effects on driving ability.

The Class I is allowing driving for all vehicles, with usual cautions, and is accompanied by a yellow warning. It includes the drugs linked with a light effect, or not demonstrated yet as safe.

The Class II is allowing driving for the “light group” of driving licences (Cars, motorcycles), but not for the “heavy group” (trucks, buses), until the decision of the medical authority for driving licences. It also means that a medical advice is mandatory to drive under this kind of treatment and is accompanied by an orange warning.

The Class III does not allow driving until the decision of the medical authority for driving licences, either for pharmacological reasons (Hypnotics, Anaesthetic drugs), or for medical reasons (drugs indicated for pathologies which induce themselves a problem of driving aptitude, like anti-epileptics, insulin, substitution treatments). It is accompanied by a red warning.

Following this report, the French authorities have asked to the French medical Agency (AFSSAPS), to set up a working group of experts in charge of establishing a list of criteria to categorise the medicinal drugs available in France in four categories, and to propose a rewriting of the package inserts based on this categorisation and compatible with the European criteria.

The working group has started in May 2003 and is supposed to give conclusions for April 2004. The final paper will give the results of the working group and the system of criteria chosen for the categorisation of drugs. It will also explain the consequences in term of rules of prescription and the interest of integrating not only the pharmacological effects of the drugs, but also their field of therapeutical indication.

A such categorisation seems to be a necessary first step for some changes in the prescriptions of drugs, taking more into account the side effects on driving, and proposing to the practitioners to use the safer drugs for driving patients.