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Business need for greater awareness of sleep disorders at work

Findings from new research into a severe and potentially devastating sleeping disorder has revealed eight out of 10 businesses that run vehicle fleets, say they would benefit from greater awareness of the condition.

Obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome (OSAS) affects about 10% of the driving population but is more common among those who drive for a living. However awareness of the condition remains low among firms which rely on commercial vehicles and their drivers.

The research, carried out by RAC Business and the OSA Partnership Group in April 2016 found more than half of businesses, (57%), said they had very little awareness of the condition and the importance of detecting and treating OSAS among their drivers.

The survey of 500 UK businesses, also revealed that 80% felt their company would benefit from greater awareness of the symptoms of OSAS, the treatment available and its impact on their drivers.

The disorder is particularly common amongst middle-aged men especially those who are overweight, and studies have shown that when a driver with untreated OSAS gets behind the wheel of a vehicle they could be up to nine times more likely to have an accident.

Despite highly effective treatment being available on the NHS, campaigners say a significant number of sufferers are undiagnosed due to the concerns they have over losing their driving licence and livelihood if they are told they can no longer get behind the wheel of a vehicle.

In fact the RAC Business survey found 80% agreed that drivers are unlikely to raise concerns with their GP, the DVLA, or their boss that they may suffer from OSAS, because they are afraid of losing their licence.

In response to these concerns, the OSA Partnership Group, with the support of RAC Business, launched a campaign in January 2016 to ensure professional drivers who were diagnosed with the condition were fast-tracked for treatment and back on the road within four weeks. Although the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's guidance to GPs is to request fast-tracking of treatment if a driver is concerned about losing their licence, in reality sufferers may have to wait many weeks or months before they receive effective treatment which ensures they can drive.

The partnership group, made up of leading medical and motor industry figures, is now calling on the Government, and the Department of Health in particular, to make diagnosis and treatment of the condition a priority, as it is thought fatigue and falling asleep at the wheel could account for 20% of accidents on the roads.

Jenny Powley, RAC Business Corporate Sales Director, said: "What our

research shows is that there is clearly a demand for more information and greater awareness among businesses about this condition, which can have devastating consequences if left undiagnosed, both for the driver and other road users.

“When you consider the significant number of commercial drivers affected, and the wider consequences if a driver has an accident due to falling asleep at the wheel, it must surely be a public health priority for the Government, and they have a role to play in ensuring employers are aware.”

Professor John Stradling from the OSA Partnership Group said: “The findings of the RAC research reinforce the need for the introduction of a mandatory Four Week Wait standard across the UK. This will provide drivers and their employers with the reassurance that if those with symptoms of OSA come forward, they will be fast-tracked for treatments so that they can get back on the road quickly.

“We call on the transport industry to support our campaign to introduce rapid treatment for those who rely on driving for their livelihood. This will not only ensure that their drivers are not at risk of falling asleep behind the wheel and thus keep them on the road, but will also improve the overall health and well-being of these drivers.”

Notes to Editors

About RAC Business Services

RAC is one of the UK's most progressive motoring organisations, providing services for both private and business motorists.

RAC Patrols repair vehicles on average within 30 minutes at the roadside and carry more than 500 parts and tools, so we're always well-equipped and ready to fix wherever possible

RAC Business offers a comprehensive range of services and products for UK businesses of all sizes and currently provides cover to around six million vehicles.

Products available include: fleet breakdown coverage, telematics, fuel cards, accident management, inspections, training, commercial and fleet insurance, fleet management (Business Club) and risk management services.

RAC also provides client-branded outsourced services and call centre support for customers of leading car manufacturers, insurance, fleet providers and logistics companies, as well as truck breakdown, truck warranty and insurance for vehicles from 3.5t to 44t.

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