

**P2** / The NAELA Powley Award turns 20. Learn more about the award and its origin in this issue's Team Tidbit.

**P3** / What can happen when an older adult stops driving? This month's guest columnist explains.

# the CONTINUUM

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## Too Old to Get Hooked?

When you think about the kind of person who becomes addicted to opioids, what comes to mind? Chances are it's not your elderly father, the sweet old woman down the street, or your grandmother in the nursing home.

Many people stubbornly cling to outdated notions about seniors and prescription drug abuse. Kit Sinyard, Director of the Sumner County Anti-Drug Coalition, shares three surprising facts that fly in the face of conventional wisdom about seniors and prescription drugs.

### **#1: Seniors don't get addicted.**

In 2009, the American Geriatric Society encouraged physicians to use opioids to treat moderate to severe pain in older patients, citing evidence that seniors were less susceptible to addiction. By 2012, addiction rates and the number of overdose deaths had soared, even though the American Geriatric Society eventually revised their position on opioid use. Kit noted that for many older adults, their drug dependence starts with a legitimate prescription from a doctor that may spark an addiction that was never anticipated. "After as few as five

days of opioid pain reliever use, one in five opioid users runs the risk of becoming dependent and continuing to use opioids one year later," said Kit, noting that as people age, they can become more at risk for dependence or overdoses.

### **#2: Seniors don't share their pills.**

When it comes to prescription medications, older adults often share their prescription drugs with others. Armed with good intentions and largely unaware of the dangers, they gladly hand over leftover pain pills and other drugs. Considering the drugs' expense, throwing away excess, out-of-date or ineffective pills can seem like a waste. "The problem is that most seniors are unaware of the risks of prescription-sharing," Kit said. "They don't necessarily see how a patient's weight, medical history, and disease profile factor into the decision to prescribe a drug. A pill that's right for one person may create dangerous problems for another."

### **#3: Seniors don't sell their pills.**

The new face of drug dealing isn't a tattooed 20-something; it's that of an elderly person. "More and more seniors are selling their own stash—and some are getting caught," said Kit. "A 30 milligram dose of oxycodone can go for \$30 and if you get a 90-day supply, it's a significant amount to someone living on a fixed income." Instead of operating like traditional drug dealers, older Americans sell their medications through a network of friends and family members, often without a good understanding of the dangers or potential legal consequences.



What is being done to stem the rise of opioid-related problems among seniors? Free lock boxes, drug takeback events, and drop boxes are just a few of the many strategies for safety.

The digital version of this article contains more information, including statistics, details about response strategies, and links to video. Find it at <https://bit.ly/2Nv6ZPH>.

## Team Tidbits

# The NAELA Powley Elder Law Award Turns 20

Did you know that 2019 marks the 20th anniversary of an award for elder law attorneys sponsored by Tim Takacs?

It's called the NAELA Powley Elder Law Award and it's presented annually by the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (NAELA) to a NAELA member who is recognized in his or her community as a leader in promoting a greater understanding of the rights and needs of the elderly, and people with special needs.

Tim established the Powley Elder

Law Award in memory of his grandparents, Wes and Helen Powley. Both were active in civic affairs for all of their lives, and Wes practiced dentistry well into his 80s.

The award is funded by a cash grant from the Takacs family to a nonprofit organization chosen by the Powley Award recipient.

The digital edition of this article includes a video of Tim talking about the award. Watch it at <https://bit.ly/2BUbyi7>.



Tim Takacs with Wes and Helen Powley



## LearningCafé recap

CLIENT EDUCATION SERIES

### Getting the Most from Your Life Care Plan

If you're a Takacs McGinnis client with a Life Care Plan, how do you make the most of your engagement with the firm? Staff members answered this question at the January 17, 2019 Learning Café.

Here are a few tips :

- ◆ Review everything in your client binder and let us know if you have any questions.
- ◆ Bring your client binder to meetings with Takacs McGinnis staff.
- ◆ Review your documents periodically. Make sure they reflect your wishes.
- ◆ Let us know about any major life events, such as death, divorce, or other changes in your family situation.
- ◆ Stay in touch. If you have questions or don't understand something, contact us by phone or email, or stop by the office.

The digital edition of *The Continuum* includes a video recap and more. View it at <https://bit.ly/2tBFRp4>.



Did you know that the digital edition of The Continuum often contains bonus content?

Email us at [continuum@tn-elderlaw.com](mailto:continuum@tn-elderlaw.com) to subscribe to the digital edition.

If you know someone who might benefit from this publication, we encourage you to share it.

## Guest Column

# Giving Up More Than Just the Car Keys

Does the loss of driving privileges hasten a senior citizen's decline?

By Robin Williams

Type the phrase “When should my elderly parents stop driving?” into any search engine and you’ll find dozens of articles offering advice about how to gently—or not so gently—bring up the issue. What you’re less likely to find, however, is much about how losing driving privileges can affect an elder’s overall well-being.

A research review conducted in 2016 by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health offers some insight. Published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, the review looked at 16 studies that compared older adults who'd stopped driving with those still on the road.

The findings were striking.

Five studies focused on depression symptoms. Overall, older adults were twice as likely to see worsening depression when they stopped driving, even when factors such as age, physical health and mental fitness were factored in. Giving up driving resulted in faster decline in cognitive function and physical health. It was also associated with a 51-percent reduction in the size of social networks of friends and relatives. Former drivers were also nearly five times as likely as current drivers to be admitted to a nursing home, assisted living community, or retirement home, after adjusting for

marital status or co-residence.

Though researchers aren't positive that the health problems are a direct result of giving up the car keys, they suspect it's a vicious cycle. Worsening health causes older people to stop driving. That, in turn, can speed their decline.

If you're caring for an elderly parent who has—or is about to—surrender the car keys, what can you do to minimize the negative impacts to his or her well-being?

- ◆ Talk with your loved one about his or her transportation needs. Assess how much support is required.
- ◆ Present alternative methods of getting around, such as family caregivers, public transportation, taxis, buses, and services such as Uber and Lyft. New volunteer ride-sharing services targeting seniors, such as Senior Ride Sumner, are another option.
- ◆ If your parent is open to trying out transportation alternatives, offer to go along for the ride. Change is always easier with support.

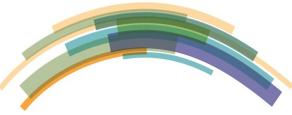
Keep in mind that it is very difficult to tell a parent that he or she should no longer drive. If your parent is less than cooperative, you have a few options. One is contacting the driver's Primary Care Physician, who may refer the elder

to a health care provider for testing or a driver evaluation like this one: <https://bit.ly/2U3McoR>. TDOT also offers a good resource. View it at <https://bit.ly/2Sroem6>.

With a little planning, you can help your elderly parents lead active and fulfilling lives without putting their—or others'—safety at risk.



*Robin Williams is founder and CEO of SilverLink LLC, a referral service for hospitals and individuals that provides a full spectrum of placement options and resources for seniors. For more information, call 615-860-1312 or visit [www.silverlinkcares.com](http://www.silverlinkcares.com).*



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*The Continuum* is a quarterly newsletter designed to enhance the service Takacs McGinnis Elder Care Law, PLLC provides to clients. Please direct feedback, questions and comments to [continuum@tn-elderlaw.com](mailto:continuum@tn-elderlaw.com).

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