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“Alert today – alive tomorrow,” the slogan on the side of the expressway once read in bright orange bolded letters. When behind the wheel of a vehicle, there are copious distractions we need to be alert to; other cars, bikes, pedestrians, signage, lights, cones, passengers, horns. While driving a car, one is not just holding the wheel in their hands, but also the responsibility of human life. The choices we make as drivers have a substantial role in protecting the lives of those around us.

My community’s primary mechanism of promoting safe driving is through education. Car accidents are the leading cause of death amongst the adolescent population in the United States [3], making this group critical members of the target audience for promoting safer driving. Our local high school is one of sixty-two in the state of Michigan to participate in a program called “Strive for a Safer Drive.” This program was developed through a partnership between the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning and Ford Driving Skills for Life. The primary objective is to raise awareness on the dangers teenagers face when driving and to educate the students on safe driving practices such as seatbelt use and adherence to speed limits [1]. Furthermore, my community also participates in a campaign called “Walk. Bike. Drive. Safe.” Pedestrians and bikers need access to the road, but they can be difficult for drivers to see and tend to make more sudden and unpredictable movements. This campaign is inspired by the higher likelihood for pedestrians and bikers to be injured or killed when involved in a motor vehicle accident [4]. An increased number of yellow crosswalk signs were posted and reinforcements of safety guidelines were circulated online as part of this campaign [2,4]. My community’s method is to remind drivers of the safety rules currently in place.

While educating the community on safe driving practices is imperative, every driver takes a test to ensure they have internalized all that information before they begin driving. New organizations and campaigns reinforcing these concepts are excellent additional resources, but to alter the statistics of traffic accidents in a more drastic manner, our community could be intervening in more direct ways. Speeding, distracted driving, and driving under the influence are all perpetually occurring issues that put the driver and everyone on the road at high risk for an accident. However, these are also situations individuals seem to get away with so commonly that many drive recklessly anticipating they will probably not face any repercussions. Law enforcement is our weapon against this. Pulling more drivers over, writing more tickets, and having more consistency in consequences may deter drivers from driving recklessly. Another aspect of driving that the community can control is the layout of the streets. The more lanes, signs and lights that are put at an intersection, the more complicated it appears to drivers. When approaching major intersections, it needs to be evident what the driver's options are. The community could focus on simplifying high traffic areas to make them easy to understand and less stressful so mistakes don't happen. Additionally, installing more sidewalks to increase walking accessibility could also mitigate accidents. When sidewalks are limited, pedestrians are forced into the road, further subjecting them to possible accidents.

There are many methods to promote safety, but it seems that more active means have fallen by the wayside. Education within a community is necessary so that individuals know the laws and safety recommendations, but most have that information before driving. What many do not have is the reinforcements and punishments needed to instill motivation to follow them.

Works Cited:

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