

ICASM 2015, AsMA 2016, and Pilot Mental Health

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The Aerospace Medical Association's Executive Director, Mr. Jeff Sventek, and I (as well as many prominent AsMA members) recently returned from the 67th International Conference of Aviation and Space Medicine (ICASM) held in Oxford, UK. I presented a lecture on Human Performance and High Reliability Organizations, co-chaired a general session panel, and released the recent AsMA Pilot Mental Health position paper (see below). Jeff Sventek manned an AsMA table, answered many questions on behalf of AsMA, assisted in several members renewing their dues and becoming life members, and helped create a world-wide buzz about our upcoming Atlantic City conference, April 24-29, 2016. What a tremendous and energizing experience! Congratulations to ICASM leadership and its UK planning team for orchestrating an unrivaled and tremendously successful event. The academic presentations were top notch. I truly believe that the rising tide of the Aerospace Medicine profession will raise all vessels and as ICASM continues to succeed, so shall AsMA.

Pilot Mental Health

In September 2012, the Aerospace Medical Association distributed our Pilot Mental Health Working Group's recommendations for improving the awareness and identification of pilot mental health issues during aeromedical assessment of pilots. We published the working group's recommendations in our scientific journal later that year. Following the Germanwings Flight 9525 tragedy in the French Alps in March 2015, the Aerospace Medical Association Pilot Mental Health Working Group, chaired by Dr. Phil Scarpa, reconvened with over 50 world-wide recognized aviation and space mental health experts to review the recommendations. As a result, the working group updated the recommendations. These can be found at the following link for your awareness and use:

<http://www.asma.org/asma/media/AsMA/pdf-policy/2015/AsMA-Pilot-Mental-Health-Working-Group-Recommendations-September-2015.pdf>

The Aerospace Medical Association is committed to the safety of the flying public and supports the current internationally agreed upon medical standards in which aviators suffering from any medical condition that jeopardizes flight safety (including mental illness) should be restricted from flying duties. We encourage all organizations involved in flight safety to carefully review and implement the AsMA Pilot Mental Health recommendations as part of their normal operations. These recommendations will promote mental health awareness and improve mental health screening. Their success will require involvement of the entire aviation community of air crew, employers, regulators, and health

care providers. We recognize there are no simple solutions. Testing for mental illness is not infallible. Some measures will take time without showing immediate effect. The risk of hazards in flying will never be zero, but we believe these recommendations, when implemented, should help reduce the already low flight safety risk due to mental illness. The Working Group found it is neither productive nor cost effective to perform extensive psychiatric evaluations as part of the routine pilot aeromedical assessment. However, it did recommend greater attention be given to mental health issues by aeromedical examiners, especially to the more common and detectable mental health conditions and life stressors which can affect pilots and flight performance. They encouraged this through increased education and global recognition of the importance of mental health in aviation safety.



AsMA Conference in Atlantic City, NJ

The AsMA conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey, continues to look bright. We have confirmation from two of our three keynote speakers. CAPT Frank Butler, Medical Corps, United States Navy (Ret), is a prior U.S. Navy SEAL who has been the Command Surgeon at the United States Special Operations Command. He has served as the Task Force Surgeon for a Joint Special Operations Counterterrorist Task Force in Afghanistan. Currently, he works as Chairman of the Committee on Tactical Combat Casualty Care, which is a component of the Defense Health Board, the senior external advisory group on medical issues to the Secretary of Defense. Dr. Butler has been instrumental in the success of DoD trauma survival rates, and he will lecture on how to save lives during aeromedical evacuations.

We also have confirmation from Germanwings Flight 9525 investigator Mr. Arnaud Desjardin. He was an expert contributor to the European Aviation Safety Agency's Task Force following the accident and is the Deputy Head of the Investigations Department, BEA France. He will be speaking about the Germanwings investigation challenges and outcomes.

AsMA Atlantic City looks to be an exciting, intellectually stimulating annual meeting and one of the best to date. Please plan on attending this most important and valuable event!

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