

New Initiatives to Improve Customer Service

Initiatives by the Office of Aerospace Medicine are intended to provide better, more timely services to our customers

Editorial, by Jon L. Jordan, MD, JD

Elsewhere in this issue of the Bulletin, you will find the announcement of a new Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) customer service initiative. While we in FAA have numerous customers, this initiative is directed at persons who do business directly with the various organizations under the direction of FAA's Associate Administrator for Regulation and Certification. As pointed out in the article, the Office of Aerospace Medicine (OAM) is one of those organizations.

Together with improving and maintaining aviation safety, providing good customer service is the motivation for many OAM initiatives that relate to airman medical certification. Although perhaps not identified explicitly as such, customer service has also been the theme of a number of the articles I have written for previous issues of the Bulletin.

Airmen comprise the OAM's largest group of customers who do business directly with the FAA. There are approximately 613,000 active pilots in the United States, all of whom are required to periodically undergo medical examinations. Each year, we receive and process about 450,000 examination reports. All of the medical examinations involve direct contact between AMEs and airmen, and the results of a significant number of those examinations require interactions between airmen and FAA employees.

Currently, almost all of our customer complaints relate to the airman medical certification system and the time it takes us to process cases that involve significant medical problems. A large number of these complaints are valid and I have to agree that the time it takes us to reach a decision in some cases is unacceptable.

As I have often said, there are reasons for certification delays. These include the large number of extremely complex cases presented to us, our willingness to consider for certification almost any medical condition, our continuing transition from a paper-based system to electronic processing of applications and medical data, and limited resources to carry out our tasks. While these may be good reasons, they are little comfort to the airmen who must wait for decisions.

In our attempts to provide better customer service, we have initiatives underway with which most of you are familiar. Although, as expected, the institution of the electronic processing of certification cases is currently presenting some transitional problems, the system is enhancing

the quality of our work and will be a major contributor to improved customer service. Additional actions we have taken to make the system work faster for airmen include the intermittent detail of our regional personnel to the AMCD, greater involvement of all of our regional offices in the certification process, and greater delegation of certification authority to AMEs. In addition, a "Tiger Team certification blitz" was organized by **Dr. Silberman** that involved a week-long concentrated effort by volunteer physicians from various parts of OAM to process cases that were backing up as a result of Dr. Boren's call to active military duty. Almost 1,000 cases were processed during this "blitz," and another one is being planned. In a nutshell, everyone is pitching in.

Another initiative we're considering relates to the clarity of the special issuance letters we send to airmen. Those letters become very complicated because they must meet certain legal criteria and because of the special monitoring conditions that are necessary for safety. The result is a letter that is sometimes confusing not only to the airman but also to the examining physician or AME who attempts to assist the airman in providing the right information in the specified timeframes. We hope to develop a more easily understood format for these letters.

While we have done a lot to reduce the log-jamb in certification, more needs to be done and we look to AMEs for more help.

As announced in this issue of the Bulletin, we have published a new electronic Internet version of the Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners. The new Guide incorporates all of our published certification policies, and you should find it much easier to use than the old hard-copy version. Familiarizing yourself with the new Guide will give you the tools you need to play a more prominent role in the early certification of airmen. In the interest of service to our airman customers, please take advantage of the opportunity.

JLJ