

from the Federal Air Surgeon's
PERSPECTIVE...

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GROUP FORMED TO INVESTIGATE PILOT FITNESS

Two recent airline tragedies, Malaysia Flight 370 and German Wings Flight 9525, have ignited the aviation community's concerns. As an outcome, a joint Federal Aviation Administration and industry group was formed to investigate the question of pilot fitness.

Known as the Commercial Aviation Safety Team, it is made up of senior safety officials from the airlines, pilot unions, manufacturers, and the Federal Aviation Administration. Because the new team lacks sufficient expertise to fully examine the question, the FAA has determined that an Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC), supported by a working group of medical professionals, would provide the most complete and expeditious review of this issue.

The Pilot Fitness ARC will provide a forum for the United States aviation community to review the following questions and provide recommendations to the FAA Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety:

- a. What does research show us about changes in awareness and reporting of emotional and mental health issues in the general population?
- b. If the review completed under Task (a) demonstrates a change in awareness and reporting of mental health issues in the general public, can we determine whether a similar change is reasonably expected to have occurred in the pilot community? If not, why not?
- c. If so, do the changes in the awareness and reporting of emotional and mental health issues reflected in the pilot community indicate increased risks to aviation safety? If so, does that suggest that further review will be useful?
- d. What methods are used to evaluate the emotional and mental health of pilots today? Do those methods differ depending on the level of medical certification held by the pilot? If so, are those differences appropriate?
- e. What methods are used to encourage pilots to report medical conditions, including emotional and mental health issues? What steps are taken when emotional and mental health conditions are reported—either by the pilot or by concerned family, friends, or co-workers?
- f. Are there barriers that prevent pilots from reporting medical conditions, including emotional and mental health issues?

Given the findings under Tasks (a) through (f), are there gaps in the methods used today to evaluate the emotional and mental health of pilots?

If there are such gaps, what would the ARC recommend to mitigate those gaps? Some examples include:

- Medical methods
- Aircraft design improvements
- In-flight policies and/or procedures
- Pilot training and/or testing improvements
- Actions by professional standards groups, airlines, and unions
- Training or other improvements for aviation medical examiners

If the Pilot Fitness Aviation Rulemaking Committee determines that there are gaps in the methods used to evaluate the emotional and mental health of pilots, it will make recommendations that may be used by the FAA to improve the emotional and mental health training and certification of U.S. pilots. The report should include:

- An explanation of the data and research found as a result of Tasks (a) through (f)
- Proposed mitigation of identified risks for aircraft design and pilot training and testing
- Revised regulatory language based on identified gaps
- Any additional information the ARC considers, associated with the tasks, that would help the FAA further understand the recommendations
- Estimated costs associated with suggested improvements

The Pilot Fitness ARC is to provide the FAA with recommendations within six months.

At present, thanks to the work done daily by aviation medical examiners, I believe our U.S. pilots undergo a reasonably robust medical screening. However, there is always opportunity for improvement, and I look forward to reporting to you the recommendations from the Pilot Fitness ARC the next time.

Thanks for all that you do for aviation safety.

—Jim