

## Operation Safe Pilot Revisited

**H**ELLO, EVERYONE. In my last editorial [Operation Safe Pilot, *Federal Air Surgeon's Medical Bulletin*, Vol. 45, No. 2, p. 2], I told you about *Operation Safe Pilot*. For those of you who did not have an opportunity to read the editorial, *Operation Safe Pilot* was a cooperative effort between the Inspectors General from the Department of Transportation and the Social Security Administration.

The purpose was to determine whether or not there were people who were fraudulently collecting total Social Security disability benefits and/or falsifying their Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) medical applications. It turns out that there were such people.

### Federal Air Surgeon's Medical Bulletin

Library of Congress ISSN 1545-1518

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*The Federal Air Surgeon's Medical Bulletin is published quarterly for aviation medical examiners and others interested in aviation safety and aviation medicine. The Bulletin is prepared by the FAA's Civil Aerospace Medical Institute, with policy guidance and support from the Office of Aerospace Medicine. An Internet on-line version of the Bulletin is available at: [www.faa.gov/library/reports/medical/fasmb/](http://www.faa.gov/library/reports/medical/fasmb/)*

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### The Federal Air Surgeon's Column



By Fred Tilton, MD

The justice department took legal action against the offenders, and the FAA revoked both their airman certificates and their airman medical certificates. In that same issue of the *Bulletin*, **Dr. Jones** provided some feedback on the 2006 FAA Aerospace Medical Services Airman Customer Satisfaction Survey, which indicated that there are a few Aviation Medical Examiners (AMEs) who are not performing examinations up to FAA standards.

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*'Our whole system depends on the honesty of our applicants and your examinations'*

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I promise you that we will not make a habit of "talking" about the same subjects in consecutive bulletins. However, airman falsification of medical applications and substandard examinations strike at the heart of our medical certification program. We rely on you, the AME, to perform good examinations, and you rely on the airman to give you accurate and complete information. The first lesson, and probably the most important lesson we learned in medical school was, "listen to the patient and take a detailed history." Our whole system depends on the honesty of our applicants and your examinations.

Congress felt this issue was so important that the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure held hearings on July

17<sup>th</sup>. The witnesses were Mr. **Nicholas Sabatini**, Federal Aviation Administration Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety (AVS-1), **Mitch Garber**, MD, from the National Transportation Safety Board, The Department of Transportation Inspector General, Mr. **Calvin L. Scovel III**, Mr. **Phil Boyer**, President of the Aircraft Owners' and Pilots Association, and I.

I will not go into a lot of detail regarding the hearings, but I do need to let you know that we agreed to some process changes. We are planning to:

- ▶ Change the FAA Form 8500-8 to include a question that asks the airman if he or she has ever received any form of disability compensation
- ▶ Add a notice similar to the National Driver Register notice on the current form, which authorizes the agency to compare the data on our 8500-8 with other agencies that might be providing disability benefits to the individual
- ▶ Enhance our quality control and AME oversight processes

The Chair of the Subcommittee on Aviation, Mr. **Jerry F. Costello**, has given us additional questions that we are addressing. I believe that Congress will ask us to take some additional steps to help assure we have a certification process that does everything it can to assure that our examination process is as robust as possible.

It is unfortunate that I have to write such an article, because most of you do an outstanding job for us, and most airmen are honest. However, the misadventures of a few are driving us to take these steps.

Remember, we all play an extremely important role in helping to assure the safety of the National Airspace. Please make sure you are completing FAA examinations according to standards, and that you remind your airmen of their responsibilities, and the consequences of falsification.

—Fred