

Federal Air Surgeon's Medical Bulletin

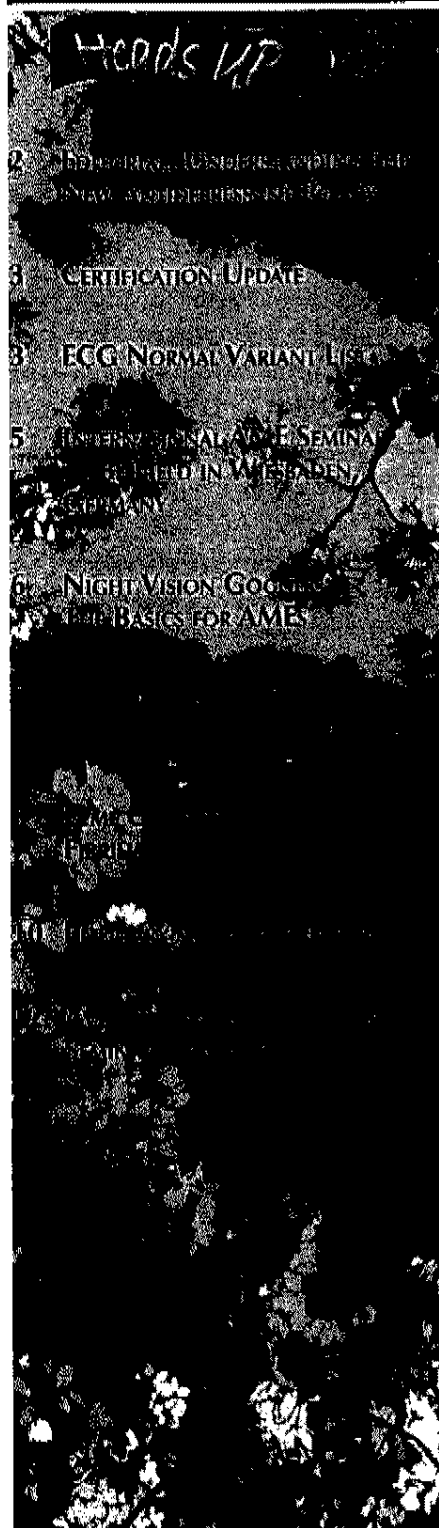


Aviation Safety Through Aerospace Medicine

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For FAA Aviation Medical Examiners, Office of Aerospace Medicine Personnel,
Flight Standards Inspectors, and Other Aviation Professionals.

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New SSRI Certification Guidelines In Place

A positive step forward that will be a benefit to aviation safety

By Michael A. Berry, MD

A NEW POLICY regarding medical certification of airmen with a history of depression treated with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressant medication went into effect on April 5, 2010. As Dr. Tilton mentions in his article (page 2), this change has been in the works for a long time.

The Office of Aerospace Medicine has been researching the safety aspects of taking this action for a number of years. We are very pleased with this new policy, believe it to be a positive step forward that will, in the end, be a benefit to aviation safety.

As with any new policy, "the devil is in the details." We have put together guidelines for HIMS- (Human Intervention Motivation Study) trained aviation medical examiners to follow, since these are not necessarily obvious from the Notice in the Federal Register (see Web documents <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-7527.pdf>; and <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2010/pdf/2010-7658.pdf>).

Please read the Federal Register notice as an introduction to this article. I recommend that all AMEs become aware of both the general policy and these guidelines to advise your airmen, even though the HIMS AMEs will be the physicians intimately involved in the process.

Rationale

Our rationale for using HIMS AMEs was two-fold. HIMS AMEs are familiar with the initial evaluation and

monitoring process that will be utilized for the SSRIs because the new policy is modeled on the process used for airmen with substance abuse and dependence diagnoses.

Second, HIMS AMEs have training and experience in evaluating airmen from a psychological perspective. This new policy has increased our need for additional HIMS AMEs. We are always looking for senior AMEs willing to participate in the extremely important work of the HIMS Program.

With the new antidepressant medication policy applying to holders of first-, second-, and third-class medical certificates, we can use both senior and

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AMED Manager Selected

Brian Pinkston, MD, MPH, is to be the new manager of the Aerospace Medical Education Division, according to an announcement by the Civil Aerospace Medical Institute Director, Dr. Melchor J. Antunano. Dr. Pinkston replaces Dr. Richard Jones, who retired last December.

Dr. Pinkston's current assignment is as Chief of Aerospace Medicine Operations, Air Force Medical Support Agency at the Office of the Air Force Surgeon General.

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regular AMEs. To participate, AMEs must first attend the annual HIMS training seminar in Denver, Colo. The exact dates in September 2010 for the seminar have not yet been finalized. Check for the dates and register to attend on the Web site, www.himsprogram.org.

POLICY

The FAA Office of Aerospace Medicine will consider Special Issuance medical certification for airmen requesting first-, second-, and third-class medical certificates, flying under FAR Parts 121, 135, or 91 who are being treated with one of several specific antidepressant medications.

CRITERIA TO BE CONSIDERED

Diagnoses

Mild to moderate depressive disorders, such as

1. Major Depressive Disorder (mild to moderate) either single episode or recurrent episode
2. Dysthymic Disorder
3. Adjustment disorder with depressed mood

PHARMACOLOGIC AGENTS CONSIDERED

(SINGLE-AGENT USE ONLY)

1. Fluoxetine (Prozac)
2. Sertraline (Zoloft)
3. Citalopram (Celexa)
4. Escitalopram (Lexapro)

SPECIFICALLY UNACCEPTABLE DIAGNOSES AND/OR SYMPTOMS

1. Psychosis
2. Suicidal ideation
3. History of electro convulsive therapy (ECT)
4. Treatment with multiple antidepressant medications concurrently
5. History of multiagent drug protocol use (prior use of other psychiatric drugs in conjunction with antidepressant medications)

PSYCHIATRIC STATUS

1. All symptoms of the psychiatric condition for which treatment is indicated must be ameliorated by the single medication, and the condition must be stable with no change in or exacerbation of symptoms for 12 months prior to certification.
2. Airman must be on a stable dosage of medication for a minimum of 12 months prior to certification.
3. Airman must have no aeromedically significant side effects of prescribed medication(s).

REQUIRED REPORTS AND CONSULTATIONS

(INITIAL CONSIDERATION)

1. Current status report from treating psychiatrist attesting to diagnosis, length of treatment, and presence of any side effects.
2. Written statement from airman regarding his status.

3. Letter from airline management (Chief pilot or designee) attesting to pilot's observed mood on medication, if previously not flying, and in pilot's admitting previous non-disclosure, a report on prior competence, crew interaction, and mood while on medication (only for first- and second-class medical certificate holders flying under FAR Parts 121 or 135).
4. Report of results of neurocognitive psychological tests and provision of raw test data: include but not be limited to — COGSCREEN AE, Trails A/B; Stroop Test; CCPT, PASAT, Wisconsin Card Sorting Test.
5. Evaluation and written report from HIMS-trained AME as to current psychiatric status of airman, treatment, and recommendation for Special Issuance certificate.

PROCESS FOR SPECIAL ISSUANCE CERTIFICATION

1. Records package sent through Aerospace Medical Certification Division (AMCD) in Oklahoma City, Okla. to AAM-200 (Washington, D.C.) for review of first-time application and approval for Special Issuance of **6 month or 12-month time-limited medical certificate, depending on age of applicant** (reviewed by Chief Psychiatrist) for first-class medical certificates and pilots flying under FAR Parts 121 or 135, **12-month time-limited medical certificate** (reviewed by Chief Psychiatrist) for second- and third-class medical certificates.
2. Subsequent Special Issuance medical certificate issued directly by HIMS-trained AME if all required documentation (as listed below) is considered acceptable—or deferred to AAM-200, Chief FAA Psychiatrist, if there are concerns.
3. 8500-8 will be transmitted to the AMCD, and follow-up report with recommendation from the HIMS-trained AME will also be forwarded to the AMCD (as per the current HIMS model for substance dependence Special Issuance).

FOLLOW-UP EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS

(ALL CLASSES OF MEDICAL CERTIFICATE)

The following materials will be forwarded to the HIMS-trained AME

1. Current status report from treating physician at the time of application for Special Issuance medical certificate.
2. Psychiatric consultation status report every 6 months for all classes of medical certificate holders.
3. Letter from airline management every 3 months for first- and second-class medical certificate holders flying under FAR Parts 121 or 135, forwarded to the HIMS AME.

After initial Special Issuance Authorization, psychometric testing will be required.

1. Annually for first- and second-class medical certificate holders flying under FAR Parts 121 or 135.
2. Every 2 years for third-class medical certificate holders.

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