USE OF MEDICATION IN THE AVIATION ENVIRONMENT
INTRODUCTION

- Guidance material for:
  General Medical Practitioners, consultants, specialists and Aeromedical Examiners (AMEs)

- Connecting the choice of medication to working conditions:
  Mitigate risk factors through the right decisions and treatment

- Use of medication:
  Familiarization with drugs and their side effects

- Developing Trust and Confidence between pilot/air traffic controller (ATCO) and his/her AME

- Educate pilots/ATCOs on the potential risks of medication including self-medication and the need to seek help
Main principles of medication use in aviation

Medication is used to treat a variety of medical conditions or to relieve symptoms. Many drugs are also available from pharmacists, supermarkets or on-line for self-medication.

✈ Evidence-based prescription: AMEs should evaluate that the correct medication is prescribed to the right patient.

✈ Collaboration with patient.

✈ Use of medication: Take into consideration the side effects and the importance of them in the aviation domain.

✈ Balance benefit and risk ratio: AMEs should assess the illness itself, the impact of the medication and the risk and benefits for the patient in his/her working environment.

✈ Sources: Use official sources for information on medication.
Guidance material for the use of medication in aviation environment

General prescribing guidance

Key points:

✈ Identify the kind and severity of the disease.

✈ Assess the risk of the disease itself to the working environment.

✈ Consider the working conditions (such as altitude, cabin pressure, stress...) in relation with the disease and treatment.

✈ Examine the side effects of drugs.

✈ Decide on a period of grounding if needed depending on the type of disease, the kind of drug and the familiarisation with any possible side effects.

✈ Helpful questions to ask yourself:
  • Does the medical condition itself preclude the safe operation of the flying activity?
  • Which is the right medication for this disease?
  • Are the potential side effects more of a risk than the medical condition?
  • Efficacy of the medication? Individual sensitivity?

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ASSESSMENT OF FITNESS

A pilot/ATCO should not fly or operate if

• The condition itself makes the pilot/ATCO unfit.
• The medication could have side effects that could affect the performance or increase the risk of incapacitation.

In case of common diseases:

If there is no evidence for adverse effects and the medication is efficacious, the pilot might fly while being under treatment.

In case of more severe diseases:

Determine the risk/benefit ratio and release pilot/ATCO from duty if necessary. For illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, psychiatric, gastro-intestinal and urological conditions the pilot/ATCO will be assessed as unfit until the stabilization or improvement of the disease. Then, supervise and re-assess patient.

Long-term treatments:

For treatments of medical conditions such as diabetes or hypertension decide on a grounding period when starting a new medication until assessing the impact of it and the performance of the patient. If medication proved efficacious without adverse effects, allow the pilot/ATCO to return to work.

Regular supervision of patients who are under long term treatment by the same treating physician.
Guidance material for the use of medication in aviation environment

Relations between pilots/ATCOs and treating physicians/AMEs

- Development of Confidence and Trust
- Win-win relation: Listen to the patient and try to find the best solution for his/her health and needs
- Education of pilots/ATCOs on the importance to seek for help
- Safe and honest dialogue
- Knowledge of medical requirements in aviation
Guidelines for treating physicians and AMEs

- Accept that all medication can have potential side effects.
- Educate pilots/ATCOs about the potential risks of self-medication.
- Consider the impact of side effects in the aviation related working environment.
- Do not deny aircrews justified treatment but inform them about the potential advantages and disadvantages of medication.
- Always consider a period of grounding when beginning new treatment.
- For treating physicians: If in doubt about the effects of illness and/or medication consult your patient’s AME.
- For AMEs: Understand the regulatory principles, guidelines and regulations.

Guidelines for pilots/ATCOs

- Do not operate if there is a need to take medication.
- Be aware that medications can have side effects which could affect flight safety and work performance.
- For pilots engaged in flying competitions: be aware of the doping rules.
- Seek advice from a medical practitioner or pharmacist before taking medication and inform them of your occupation.
- Inform the AME when taking medication.
- Be prepared to be grounded or prevented from working when taking medication for the first time.