


Safeguarding Your Medical

by David Hale



At some point in time, virtually every active pilot will experience an FAA medical problem. Without proper handling, he or she could be grounded. Most pilots realize that every FAA exam is a potentially grounding event. New medical conditions are often discovered during a routine FAA exam. Sometimes the pilot is not even aware that certain conditions result in grounding. Even if a pilot understands the significance of a condition, he or she is usually unprepared for the lengthy evaluation and intricate paperwork that follows.

• When presented with a disqualifying condition, the FAA requires the aviation medical examiner (AME) to document the condition and forward the application and medical certificate to the FAA's *Aeromedical Certification Division* (AMCD) in Oklahoma City within two weeks.¹ The FAA processes the application and responds with a form letter outlining the prerequisites for certification. By this time, the pilot has been grounded for three to four months!

If you lie about a condition, the FAA and your insurance company can hand down some pretty stiff penalties. You could be reported through the FAA's anonymous toll-free number. Imprisonment, fines and certificate suspension are punitive options at the FAA's disposal. If you have an accident, your insurance company also may not pay the claim.

However, with careful preparation, you can continue to fly without fear of losing your medical certificate. Here are some steps you can take:

1. Get a regular exam from your personal physician. I am often asked if it is a good idea to use an AME as a personal physician. While this one-stop shopping may be handy, the AME is an agent of the FAA and is obligated to report your condition.² If you are reluctant to divulge a potentially grounding health issue, this may be an indication that your doctor-patient relationship is less than ideal.

The *Federal Aviation Regulations* only require you to report a medical condition when you wish to resume flying.³ If you ground yourself, you should wait until you have proof you are fit to fly before presenting your condition to the FAA. This approach will save time for you and your AME.

2. Practice for your FAA medical. A precertification assessment is the best way to assure flight fitness. You should establish FAA medical eligibility *before* your FAA medical exam; this way, if you do have a problem, the paperwork, which demonstrates your flight fitness, is in hand before your FAA exam.

Precertification assessments virtually eliminate premature applications. As a result, valuable time once lost to deferred or denied applications is minimized.

Precertification consultations are available from numerous organizations

3. Hire a case manager. Aeromedical case managers

Aeromedical Resource	Service Provided	How to Contact
Aviation Medicine Advisory Service	Provides aeromedical support for ALPA, APA, IACP and FPA airline pilot unions	Contact your union or call 303-341-4435
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association	Information for members	301-695-2000 (www.aopa.org)
Experimental Aircraft Association	Information and a network of AME advocates for members	920-426-4800 (www.eaa.org)
Pilot Medical Solutions, Inc.	Information and case managers who manage medical records	800-699-4457 (www.leftseat.com)
Virtual Flight Surgeons, Inc.	Information and medical record management from board certified physicians	(www.aviationmedicine.com)

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speaking the medical language and some will retrieve, review, organize and submit medical records to the FAA. Case managers have aeromedical education and experience but, more importantly, they have a familiarity with FAA bureaucracy. Early preparation may spare you from the frustration of a lengthy grounding period or denial. While very few pilots are ultimately denied, many pilots suffer needlessly because they don't prepare or take advantage of the help that is available.



David Hale is a commercial pilot and director of Pilot Medical Solutions, Inc.

He is a member of the Aerospace Medical Association, serves on the advisory board for Spartan School of Aeronautics, and is a contributing author to numerous publications, including, the Federal Air Surgeons Medical Bulletin.

¹ FAA, *Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners*, (Washington, D.C.: October 1999), p. 9.

² United States Code, Title 18, Secs. 1001; 357

³ United States Department of Transportation, *Federal Aviation Regulations*, FAR 61:53