

American Heart Month

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Among the many health-related and non-health-related issues claiming February as their month, American Heart Month caught my eye. Cardiovascular conditions remain the number one reason for flying waivers in the United States. Yet as a recent large survey found, aircrew members were likely to delay care longer for cardiac symptoms than the non-flying public because they were concerned about their flying status. This is not uncommon for many conditions. How can we as an aerospace medicine and human factors organization make a difference?

First, we have to acknowledge our population frequently delays care for medical and mental health conditions. There are many reasons—fear of the unknown, potential loss of flying, not believing the symptoms could be real and life threatening, or deciding the symptoms are due to something else. Unfortunately, ignoring symptoms frequently makes things much worse as the disease process progresses. It is much more challenging to return to the flight deck when dealing with significant or end-stage disease.

So what can we do about it? In a word: educate. Get the facts and go speak to pilots and other aircrew members. Hang out at your local squadron, aviation group, or flight school. Listen and

correct misinformation. Write columns for the local newsletters or magazines. Emphasize early intervention has better outcomes. Talk about prevention. If we can openly discuss a sensitive topic, we get an informed population and that can reduce the stigma of not being 100% fit. It will also decrease fear. And, maybe, we can save a life.

What else? Stay educated ourselves on the trends in diseases and treatment advances. Follow the research, or participate ourselves. Just the recent progress in cancer treatment is astounding. Progress in medical technology and systems is bringing us closer to the sick bays of futuristic science fiction shows.

We will be critical in affecting a paradigm shift away from pilots and other aircrew members delaying care and it is a challenge worth accepting!



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