

Aero Medical Society and Aviation in India*

AIR VICE MARSHAL AJIT NATH PVSM**

The Chief of Air Staff, Lt General Ved Prakash, distinguished medical colleagues, members of the Aero Medical Society, ladies and gentlemen,

I extend a warm welcome to you all at the 16th Annual Meeting of the Aero Medical Society of India. It is a great honour for the Society to have Air Chief Marshal O. P. Mehra, our distinguished Chief of Air Staff, with us this morning, Sir, your valuable contribution to the growth and development of the Indian Air Force from its early years, your outstanding achievements in the field of armament research, and aircraft industry distinguish you as a great leader. More than that, your deeply religious approach to human problems, and your desire to listen and help others are attributes of a good man. The members of the Aero Medical Society are grateful to you for accepting my invitation to inaugurate the Session this morning.

For 22 years now, this society has been working as a scientific body for development of research and study in medical problems of aviation. From its inception in 1953, the Society has received encouragement from the founding fathers of the Indian Air Force, because the men who fly know the value of a doctor in flying efficiency and flight safety. In the Air Force this bond of mutual trust and faith between the pilots and their doctors grows from the

days of squadron life. I can recollect the days when our distinguished guest, the Air Chief, joined the Squadron as a young pilot officer. It is this camaraderie between the pilots and doctors which has kept the Society alive in the early years of its formation, when "aviation medicine" was considered a fantasy of misguided young Air Force Medical Officers. Today, the Specialists in Aerospace Medicine have helped to make man's flight to the Moon a reality. It is, therefore, a matter of great satisfaction for me to see, in the evening of my career, that the Society, inspite of initial difficulties has grown over the years, and today has over 400 members, and fulfils an important role not only in the medical profession but also in the aviation industry in the country.

Recently we have had a spate of accidents in the Indian Airlines which has highlighted the various shortcomings in the civil aviation organisation. A high-powered body has been appointed by the Government to look into this problem. The Aero Medical Society has been discussing the shortcomings in the medical set-up of civil aviation and various proposals have been put up by Air Headquarters, but so far very little has been done to improve it. Maintenance of health standards of pilots by frequent checks, evaluation of normal processes of ageing to determine fitness of serving flying personnel both, in the

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Civil Aviation and the Air Force, is an important responsibility of the aviation medical specialist. It is also his responsibility to recommend norms and procedures in human factors to make flying safe and prevent flying accidents. The doctor's job in aviation is a wholtime profession like any other speciality of Medicine.

Today our national airlines carry over 3 million passengers annually and hope to increase it to 5 million in the next few years. With such a large expansion of civil aviation industry in the country an independent medical authority to control the medical problems of civil aviation is absolutely essential for the safety of those who travel by air. There is an urgent need in my opinion, therefore, to set up the Institution of Federal Air Surgeon with powers and authority to control the policy of aircrew medical surveillance, medical licensing, flight safety regulation, etc., concerning civil aviation. The Air India and Indian Airlines employ over 1500 pilots and aircrews. Flight safety demands an effective medical care of these personnel, and also of those who are employed in flight controller and other allied duties. For this work you need trained Aviation Medicine Specialists.

As there are no post-graduate training facilities in Aviation Medicine in our medical colleges, the Air Force has thrown open the facilities of the Institute of Aviation Medicine at Bangalore, for training of civilian doctors in this speciality. The Institute of Aviation Medicine, which is affiliated to the Bangalore University, is running a Post-graduate Diploma Course in Aviation Medicine. This course, I am glad to say, has been approved by the Medi-

cal Council of India. The Institute has also been permitted to start the M. D. Course in Aviation Medicine. All these measures will benefit the Civil Aviation industry in the country in the long run.

In the field of Aviation Medicine we have to look ahead and plan research activities relevant to the further generation of aircraft in collaboration with the aircraft industry. In the clinical field the Institute of Aviation Medicine has gained some experience in Hyperbaric medicine in the last few years. There is considerable scope for research in this subject especially for the treatment of battle injuries and reconstructive surgery. The Air Force has already offered the facilities of its Hyperbaric chambers for the treatment of civilian patients. A number of lives and limbs of civilian patients suffering from Gas Gangrene and Tetanus have been saved. Recently a young boy whose leg was about to be amputated due to Gas Gangrene was flown from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi to Bangalore. His leg has been saved by Hyperbaric oxygen treatment. The Air Force proposes to offer this facility for civilian patients on regional basis in the country in the near future.

The other important field in which clinical research is necessary, is the effect of stress diseases and commonly prescribed drugs on flying efficiency. The improvement in the standard of living in the country has brought about a changing pattern of diseases, with stress diseases becoming increasingly common. Proper understanding of these diseases on physiological function would greatly help in streamlining medical categorisation of serving personnel and

there by improve utilisation of experinced manpower.

A few years ago the Society established an Oration in the memory of late Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee, "Father of the Indian Air Force" whose foresight and encouragement were responsible for the establishment of Aero Medical Society and the Institute of Aviation Medicine. We have today with us Group Captain Peter Howard, Director of Research, Institute of Aviation Medicine, Farnborough, a distinguished Physiologist and Research Scientist, who has very kindly accepted

our invitation and has come all the way from U. K. to deliver the Oration this year. I would like to mention how much we appreciate the gesture of Air Marshal Sir Ernest Sidey, Director General of the Royal Air Force Medical Service, for making Group Captain Howard's visit possible. His visit, I am sure, will further strengthen the close cooperation between the Medical Services of the I.A.F. and the R.A.F.

I now request you, Sir, to inaugurate the 16th Annual Meeting of the Society.

