

79th Annual Scientific Meeting of the Aerospace Medical Association (AsMA), May 11-15, 2008, Sheraton Hotel, Boston, Massachusetts.

Report by Dr J D Hill DM FRCP

It was my privilege and pleasure to attend the above meeting in my capacity as a civilian AME, and as an external Cardiologist for the CAA. My attendance was made possible by the award from the Royal Air Force of the Stewart Memorial Prize.

The Meeting and Participants.

The meeting was held in the Sheraton Hotel, one of the largest in Boston, allowing a large number of delegates from all over the world. Inevitably the dominant number came from the USA, who proved excellent hosts. There were a satisfying number of Air Force delegates from around the world, particularly from the US and Europe, but also from the civilian authorities in a large number of countries, sadly without any visible presence from India or China. There was at least 1 female presenter from Japan. 6 lecture theatres were in full-time operation, with prominent poster sessions in addition. Committee sessions were held among those involved at lunch-times and after the last lecture sessions.

The Programme.

The programme covered a very wide spectrum of subjects related to Aviation and Aerospace Medicine, reflecting the considerable amount of work done by the organising committee over the previous months. The Chairmen were extremely efficient in keeping speakers to their times, and in controlling the audience, questions etc.. The speakers were clear and concise, with well prepared messages in short time slots, I suspect because of the total volume of material to be imparted.

The Lectures.

Because of my cardiological speciality, I was particularly interested in any cardiovascular or cerebrovascular subject, but also in the general discussions about Aeromedical disposal problems which beset us all from time to time. Both were well served during the conference. There were quite wide-ranging discussions on the management of Transient Ischaemic Attacks and strokes in professional pilots, and equally interesting panel talks on individual cases with various forms of heart disease, and available methods of prevention. I found great comfort in the fact that we all face the same type of problems in general terms, but that in each of the cases presented, there appeared to be a willingness to discuss and argue different points of view, with rather erudite speakers who “knew what they didn’t know”. As with many global societies, it was clear that many delegates and lecturers from different countries knew each other quite well in personal terms, and were willing to discuss their common problems from different perspectives. Of course, much of the value of these meetings comes from the many contacts made outside the lecture halls, and this aspect was evident to me as well.

Overall Impressions.

Despite the fact of being an AME for 16 years, and a CAA Cardiologist for at least 10 years, this meeting was certainly a landmark for me. From the former point of view I felt better educated on a number of “hot-potato” subjects which we have revisited many times in the past. From the latter point of view, I was reassured about the will to involve particular specialists in individual cases, providing rational and repeatable compromise solutions for individual pilots, and a general wish to demonstrate a level of fairness not seen nearly enough these days in other parts of medical practice and indeed licencing. I felt generally stimulated, and was sorry to miss the first and last sessions because of flight arrangements.

As a result of this visit, I would certainly hope to come again to one of the AsMA meetings, perhaps next time in Europe. I remain very grateful to the RAF for their generous support which enabled me to come.

**Dr J D Hill DM FRCP
Consultant Cardiologist
c/o Peel Croft Surgery
Lichfield Street
Burton-upon-Trent
DE14 3RH**