

When a Pilot Feels Sick

by

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All of us experience days when we just don't feel well. Employees can simply call in sick. Students can stay home from school. Pilots also have to make those decisions. But the issue becomes more complicated when a flight instructor has students scheduled for lessons. Or, there is an important business issue requiring a flight that day to another town. Sometimes these decisions are more difficult than the "go" "no go" decisions that depend on weather. And we all learn early in our flying career that the pilot is the one who has ultimate responsibility for making an intelligent choice, as part of the pre flight process that determines if we are fit to fly.

Recently, I saw an advertisement for an allegedly "safe" product that was marketed to pilots as a flu medicine that "works" in the cockpit. As I pondered this promotional for the homeopathic remedy called *oscillococcinum*, I couldn't help wondering what a pilot with flu symptoms was doing in that passenger jet, when the normal routine for fighting flu symptoms is to stay home in bed. I learned more about this so-called remedy, and after writing the FAA and talking with some fellow pilots, it seemed appropriate to discuss the matter here.

This homeopathic concoction was discovered by a French physician, Joseph Roy, while on military duty during the Spanish flu epidemic of 1917. He reported seeing some strange microorganism, bacteria looking like unequal balls that performed a quick vibratory motion. Unfortunately, subsequent bacteriologists have never been able to see those special cocci. Doctor Roy at first thought he had made a thrilling discovery on the road to a cure for cancer. He even wrote a book about it. Most scientists, however, doubted that a single cause could be found for nearly all diseases.

Ultimately, the idea caught on with followers of Samuel Hahnemann (1775-1843), the father of modern homeopathy. This philosophy also assumes that diseases do not have specific causes. Further, that imparting an artificial disease to a person can somehow drive out the real disease. And so the remedy called *oscillococcinum* was envisioned. Doctor Roy took for a source of his remedy the moscovy duck. Biologists know this bird as *Cairina moschata*, which French cooks use to prepare duck breast. Since 1925, *oscillococcinum* has been prepared as follows: into a one liter bottle, a mixture of pancreatic juice and glucose is poured. Next the duck is decapitated and 35 grams of its liver and 15 grams of its heart are put into the bottle. After 40 days in the sterile bottle, this mixture has disintegrated into a kind of goo, which is diluted many times. In fact, the mixture is shaken and poured out, emptied and refilled about 100-200 times, then moistened with small amounts of milk sugar and sold in capsules as a cure for the flu.

The proponents of this remedy admit that there might not be one molecule of the original substance in the product. If you consider the numerous water dilutions, the concentration approximates one molecule in an ocean of water, a process very unlikely to produce any biologic activity. So the product is probably innocuous, except to the pocket book, giving the false sense

of security that a pilot could safely fly an airplane with symptoms of congestion, fever, cough, or chills resembling the flu. With this in mind, it is better to drink pure water, lots of it, and stay in bed for a day or two. Altitude is not the place for congested pilots, much less air transport specialists, who have whole plane loads of VIP passengers to look out for. Furthermore, the low humidity of a pressurized plane is not the place for people with respiratory congestion. Nor are the common flu and cold remedies, such as antihistamines or decongestants approved for pilots in command, even when sitting in their planes on the taxiway.

The good news is that our bodies will shortly heal themselves. We just need to give the process a little time. For a longer list of safe and rational remedies, which are as good for pilots as for passengers, when these winter illnesses hit suddenly, you can check our web site, or my book of home remedies, called *Get Well At Home*.

Don't be foolish when it comes to flying sick. You wouldn't take your plane up when it vibrates and wheezes, smokes or coughs. Any aviator needs equal or better consideration. Safe flying is more likely when the pilot feels well. Then your take off can be followed by a pain-free landing.

*[Doctor Hansen, author of the popular book on home health care, **Get Well At Home**, currently serves as medical director of the **Emerald Valley Wellness Clinic**, and its **Live-for-Health Seminars** in Creswell, Oregon. Pilots who for health reason are having trouble passing their medical should contact us. For further information or inquiries, contact: clinic1@emeraldwellness.com]*