



Helping Pilots for Forty Years

HIMS:

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Contributing Writer

The HIMS (Human Intervention Motivation Study) program, the oldest pilot assistance program under the ALPA umbrella, turned 40 this year. And throughout its existence, this federally supported substance abuse, peer intervention, and treatment program has helped return airline pilots to flying while enhancing the safety and security of the U.S. airline industry.

HISTORY

HIMS program training was initially funded in the 1970s by the National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) and came about due to the relentless work of ALPA and Dr. Richard L. Masters, ALPA's then new aeromedical advisor, along with Capt. Rod Gilstrap (United) and Capt. Gil Chase (Continental). Pilot involvement—pilots helping pilots—set the tone going forward.

The NIAAA funding was in effect for a total of 10 years. After a brief gap, the FAA picked up funding for program training in 1992 and has funded it ever since, with ALPA being awarded each contract. Because of ALPA's direct advocacy efforts, funding was included in the Fiscal Year 2014 omnibus appropriations legislation that will amount to more than \$1 million over the next few years. "ALPA has realized that supporting HIMS is going to save lives," said Capt. Chris Storbeck (Delta), ALPA's HIMS chair.

Capt. Sean Cassidy, ALPA's first vice president and national safety coordinator, echoed those thoughts. "HIMS is one of those invaluable programs that

most people are not aware of," he said. "But it benefits some of our members tremendously. It does so by recognizing that nobody's perfect, that we're all susceptible to all kinds of struggles. There is tremendous benefit in helping our members find a path back toward a successful and healthy future."

Before the HIMS program, being identified with a substance abuse problem was career ending. The FAA would revoke the pilot's medical certificate or management would fire the pilot—or both. Not only did this discourage afflicted pilots from getting the help they needed, it also discouraged their colleagues from reporting potential safety issues. In the tight camaraderie of the cockpit, no one wanted to be the person who ended his or her coworker's career.

That was then. Today, the HIMS program helps pilots in need—and those pilots are paying it forward. Storbeck and Dr. Donald Hudson, the HIMS program manager and a former ALPA aeromedical advisor, estimate that more than 75 percent of peer monitors in the program have been through HIMS as a participant. It's clear that a large number of pilots who go through the program give back so that others can receive the same benefits.

HOW IT WORKS

The administrators of the HIMS program make clear that they don't diagnose anyone, nor do they treat anyone. That is left to the professionals. What the HIMS program does, though, is educate pilots and management about the program, aid pilots in getting the help they need, and monitor pilots throughout the reinstatement process. While the Aviation Medicine Advisory Service (AMAS), ALPA's Aeromedical Office, coordinates the educational components of HIMS, airlines administer their own HIMS program consistent with FAA guidelines to help their pilots.

Once it's determined that a pilot has a potential problem, the goal is to have the pilot agree to an evaluation. Only a trained medical professional—an addiction medicine psychiatrist or psychologist—can diagnose the pilot.

After an assessment has been completed and the pilot has been diagnosed with an addiction, the next steps are treatment and recovery. The FAA strongly recommends a residential treatment program of at least 28 days. ALPA HIMS chairs and ALPA's Aeromedical Office can recommend a treatment center to the pilot, and many airlines' HIMS programs have relationships with centers. Once the pilot completes treatment, he or she begins a program of comprehensive and continuing care in which members of the airline HIMS program monitor the pilot's continuing recovery.

Capt. Rich Wilkening (Envoy Air), ALPA's HIMS vice chair, spoke at the HIMS Basic Education Seminar in Denver, Colo., in early September on the aftercare and recovery process. "We prepare our pilots for their new life," he explained. "We've taken away their coping mechanism [alcohol or chemical dependency], and we need to teach them how to cope."

During this period of intense treatment, the pilot will periodically meet with members of his or her HIMS team, including aftercare counselors, company and peer monitors, and a HIMS-trained psychologist and psychiatrist. A designated HIMS-trained FAA senior aviation medical examiner, known as an independent medical sponsor (IMS), will assemble a records package that contains evaluation, treatment, and monitoring reports from these sources and then send the pilot's

completed case file to the FAA Medical Specialties Division in Washington, D.C., to review and approve the pilot's return to work under close monitoring.

WHY IT WORKS

There are a number of reasons why the HIMS program has been so successful, but it comes down to the incredible level of partnership, trust, and openness among pilot participants, ALPA, medical professionals, airlines, and the FAA. From the beginning, understanding that alcohol and chemical addiction is a disease has been the key to the program's success. "Management involvement in particular is critical," said Storbeck, "with a 'disease' approach to the problem." Pilots need to know that they will be helped, not punished, when they come forward. "There's still an erroneous stereotype," said Dr. Quay Snyder, ALPA's aeromedical advisor, "that this is a behavior of choice rather than a disease."

One of the easiest ways to convince management that the HIMS program is worthwhile is to point to the bottom line. Storbeck noted that for legacy carriers, every dollar spent on pilot rehabilitation can save \$11 in training costs. Smaller airlines and regional airlines may not have the same costs associated with training, but they still see a return on investment. They will save a minimum of \$2 for every dollar spent on rehab.

FAA: THE FINAL PIECE

The final and perhaps most important piece of the HIMS partnership is the FAA. Without the FAA's support and approval, it's safe to say that HIMS simply wouldn't exist. Dr. Nicholas Lomangino, the acting manager of the FAA's Medical Specialties Division—which determines whether a pilot is approved to return to the cockpit—succinctly described the HIMS program as "40 years of saving lives." But the FAA's specific interests, he said, lie in safety. "Our primary mission is safety," he stated. "We're obligated to identify safety risks. As long as pilots can perform safely when they return to work, that's what our interest is in."

The FAA enthusiastically participates in this program with ALPA and the airlines. "We actively work with pilot organizations so that we can establish programs that meet our safety objectives," explained Lomangino. He praised the partners involved, pointing

to "a mutual trust and openness in communication and a balanced approach to problem-solving and creating solutions" as beneficial to all parties.

THE NEXT 40 YEARS

ALPA's Aeromedical Office may not have the next 40 years planned out, but it's working to ensure that the HIMS program continues to help return airline pilots to the cockpit.

Storbeck, who has been with HIMS since 1991 as a volunteer, is stepping down as chairman at the end of the year. "He raised HIMS to a new level," praised Dr. Lynn Hanks, a member of the HIMS Advisory Board and a pioneer in addiction medicine. Added Hudson, "He brings the pilot perspective—it is the pilots' program, and he represents them extremely well."

As the HIMS vice chair, Wilkening provides a regional pilot's perspective to the HIMS program. "The biggest difference between airlines' programs," he explained, "is the level of support. Legacy carriers go out of their way to support pilots, while the regionals run the gamut in terms of support.

"There are people who we haven't reached yet," he said. "We're going to save lives, we're going to save families, and we're going to save careers. I'm in the lifesaving business," Wilkening concluded.

HIMS is in the lifesaving business, too. 

DR. MASTERS FLIES WEST

On Oct. 19, 2014, Dr. Richard Masters, ALPA's first aeromedical advisor and an icon in aerospace medicine, died peacefully at his home in Denver, Colo. A graduate of Wayne State, the University of Michigan, and Harvard, Masters had an illustrious career as a flight surgeon in the U.S. Air Force, including a tour of duty in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. Upon discharge from the Air Force, he was employed in the astronaut medical evaluation program at the Lovelace Clinic in New Mexico. In 1969, he became ALPA's first aeromedical advisor, relocated to Denver, and established Aviation & Preventive Medicine Associates (APMA), better known as ALPA's Aeromedical Office.

In 1972, collaborating with Capt. Rod Gilstrap (United) and Capt. Gil Chase (Continental), Masters successfully petitioned ALPA's Board of Directors to support the groundbreaking occupational substance abuse identification and treatment program known as HIMS. During his 24-year tenure as director of ALPA's Aeromedical Office, APMA provided consultative medical assistance to more than 22,000 ALPA members, establishing a benchmark of excellence unmatched in his profession. In 1993, Masters was made an honorary member of ALPA. ●

