

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration
NASA Headquarters
Washington DC 20546-0001



12 July 2023

NID 1850.141
NPR 1850.1

Reply to Attn of: **Office of the Chief Health and Medical Officer**
M-QA-2023-070

TO: Director, Human Health and Performance
JSC Chief Medical Officer
KSC Chief Medical Officer
AFRC Chief Medical Officer
Director, JSC Human Resources Office
Director, KSC Human Resources Office
Director, AFRC Human Resources Office

FROM: Dr. J.D. Polk
NASA Chief Health and Medical Officer

SUBJECT: Appropriate Credentials for NASA Flight Surgeons

For NASA, appropriate training and expertise is paramount to providing expert quality care to our aviator and astronaut patient population. For over 65 years, we have used our knowledge of clinical care, preventive medicine, and aerospace medicine to protect our patients and our missions. This has led to an unprecedented record of not having to return an astronaut from space for a medical reason to date, despite the increasing length and complexity of our missions.

This memorandum is to clarify and make known the current NASA policy setting forth the credentials of flight surgeons qualified in space medicine responsible for the care of astronauts in the U.S. Space Program. It should be noted that this is not a change to our current policy but rather is a restatement of our continued intent and practice to maintain the quality of care for our astronauts and the expected credentials required.

All NASA Flight Surgeons responsible for engaging in mission support and care of U.S. Astronauts will have an M.D. or D.O. degree from an accredited institution (or MBBS/MBChB or equivalent if medical training was completed outside the U.S.), be licensed in a U.S. state to practice medicine, have board certification in either their primary specialty or aerospace medicine, and have completed either a military primary aerospace medicine training leading to the designation of flight surgeon, an accredited (by the American College of Graduate Medical Education) aerospace medicine residency or fellowship training program, or an accredited Undersea and Hyperbaric Medicine fellowship. These specific requirements outlined above are not imposed on the occupational health contracts, occupational medicine physicians, or other physicians not involved in the direct mission-related care of an U.S. Astronaut.

Our risks and mission have become more complex as durations have increased and we progress farther out into space. For that reason, the core competencies and skills that the flight surgeon must bring to

bear have changed over time. Therefore, the Office of the Chief Health and Medical Officer will undertake a study of what the core competencies are for the practice of space medicine and what skills may be needed for future Moon to Mars architecture missions. We will be reaching out to our current Flight Surgeon cadre, past NASA Flight Surgeons, and the current aerospace medicine residencies for their input.

The goal of outlining the core competencies is not only to create a guidepost for NASA on the training and expertise needed for optimal space exploration medical support but also to share that training and expertise with outside agencies, residency programs, boards, companies, and international partners so they may also benchmark off these competencies in order to have the highest quality care for those traveling in space. The intention is to share our expertise so that they may learn from those of us who have been engaged in the care of astronauts.

The policy clarified in this memorandum will be incorporated into NPR 1850.1, Quality Assurance of the NASA Medical Care, within one year.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. D. Polk, DO, EdD, MMM, CPE, FACOEP, FAsMA, FEWM".

J. D. Polk, DO, EdD, MMM, CPE, FACOEP, FAsMA, FEWM
Chief Health and Medical Officer, NASA HQ

cc

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OCHMO/V. Michaud

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