PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

Addressing so much more than 4U 9525

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The pilot profession:
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- Requires a defined psychological (characterial?) profile:
  - Independent thinker, usually strong character but still dedicated team players
  - Decision friendly
  - Mentally balanced & stable characters
  - Strong professional links between individual pilots due to shared values, lifestyles and experiences.
  - Highly skilled & trained (usually highly motivated)

- However, just like others, pilots are not immune & vulnerable to many outside influences:
  - Multiple job stresses (safety / managerial / economic)
  - Additional burdens: costs / new business & employment types / operating to the limits of legal provisions more and more.
  - “common” life stresses (financial, health, family …)
Why Peer Support?

- Pilots usually approach assessments (medical / psych) with a solid portion of mistrust.
- Pilots are much more open with their issues towards peers than to outsiders (shared values, lifestyles, experiences).
- If we want to avoid people with issues to be driven ‘underground’ but come forward to seek help, we need to:
  - Offer a “safe zone” where they can be open without fear of either retribution or jeopardising their livelihood.
  - De-stigmatise mental health issues.
  - Approach them with respect & gain their trust.
Why Peer Support?

AND IT WORKS:

HIMS (Human Factor Intervention & Motivation)
From Inception 1975 to 2014:

- 5,000 pilots were identified, treated & returned to flying under close supervision. This is based on a US airline population of about 200,000 pilots.
- Most HIMS cases involve alcohol but not all.
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The long term success rate in this PSP is 88-90%
Success factors for a Peer Support Programme

- Self-contained structure
- Full involvement of all relevant stakeholders including crew representation bodies
- Autonomous & independent
- Not directly accessible by outside stakeholders (regulator / management / media) – but their support is a must!
The mentality challenge

- Need to involve ALL stakeholders:
  - Pilots / crews
  - Operators
  - Pilot Associations
  - Legislator/oversight/licensing Authority

- WE ALL need to take a leap of faith towards each other:
  - Trust
  - Respect
  - Mutual understanding away from stakeholder “dogmas”
  - Open & Just Culture
  - Did I mention….

For pilots, most often the crew rep. association is representative of their trust...
The Regulatory Challenge

- How to put the requirements of trust and respect in a legal text?
- How to make legislation effective if we require a ‘mentality shift’ for it to be successful?
- Legislation must **not** endanger current programmes, but help promote them.
Peer Support & SMS

- PSP should become mandatory for each operator & be available in each EU country
- The operator needs to manage the risks of mental health / substance abuse
- PSP should be the default / standard tool to manage that risk. – HOWEVER:
- The day-today running of the PSP must be independent from the operator’s SMS and be hermetically closed (‘Safe/Trust Zone’)

EASA Aircrew Medical Fitness Workshop, 2015
Peer Support vs. alternatives

Recurrent full Psychological Assessment

- Unreliable if not done correctly (high number of False positives)
- Inefficient (time required during recurrent for meaningful results)
- Low acceptance by crew (is it really solid science?)
- Undermines trust in the system
- Additional stressor (fear of unjust assessment, abuse, ...)

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Peer Support vs. alternatives

Random Drug & Alcohol testing

- Potentially expensive
- Low acceptance by crew
- Quite ineffective (e.g.: CASA Australia)
- 56,595 random tests => 12 positives (CASA)
- Last 30 years:
  - 0,02% incidents / Accidents D&A related
  - NONE IN PUBLIC AIR TRANSPORT!
Peer Support Programmes:

- Enable early identification of problem cases through the intervention of ‘peers’, i.e. colleagues / fellow-pilots

- Allow the pilots to be guided towards help, i.e. counseling and, if needed, treatment & rehabilitation

- Allow the airline to maintain crews if and after they successfully went through treatment, rather than losing staff and having to hire & train new ones
Peer Support Programmes:

- Enable early intervention of problem cases through the intervention of 'peers', i.e. colleagues/fellow pilots.
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It's all about PREVENTION & FINDING SOLUTIONS!
What’s Needed to achieve this

- A REAL & effective solution to detect & prevent substance abuse & mental issues, is accepted by the crews, helps to mitigate the risks & supports continued medical fitness

- Legislation that mandates PSP, strengthens existing programs & supports current good practices

- Full Involvement of all relevant stakeholders, incl. regulatory bodies to positively support Peer Support

- **Acceptance of Pilot Representation Bodies as Key players & enablers of Peer Support.**
Thank you!

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