

COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE MEDICAL PHYSIOLOGIQUE (CIMP)

National Report - United Kingdom

By Dr Peter Saundby

During the year there have been no serious accidents caused by disease, although there was one micro-light accident in which the pilot had a high level of ethanol at autopsy. Accidents arising from alcoholic intoxication have reduced over the years and should have been eliminated through education. However these accidents have been restricted to powered aircraft operations indicating that the club oversight necessary to launch un-powered aircraft is a powerful tool controlling improper behaviour.

Contradictions exist in our government policy, on the one hand young persons are expected to participate in sport, on the other, barriers are put up against both participants and instructors. Recent laws intended to prevent paedophile abuse require an intrusive official clearance of all adults concerned with children. A consequence has been the exclusion from most model aircraft clubs of young persons under the age of eighteen because that is simpler than clearing all their adult members according to law.

In past reports I have been concerned with older pilots, now we have problems with the young pilots. In recent months there have been several cases with a common history. These are healthy young men with a para-psychiatric diagnosis such as attention deficit disorder or panic attacks. Some had been on long term treatment with ritalin or related drugs. My practice has been to say that participation in air sports would be therapeutic and then to seek a report from the club. One Chief Instructor wrote "I am forming the opinion that the youngster's biggest problem is his overpowering, interfering, over protective father". Other cases have all performed well. Is this a widespread problem? Does it merit further study? Is the general policy that a psychiatric diagnosis needing treatment disqualifies from a flying career still valid?

The late Peter Scott became a UK gliding champion. His explorer father when dying in the Antarctic snow during 1912 famously wrote to his wife, 'that the boy should be in the open air'. Was he right?

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