



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Research and Engineering
Washington, DC

Medical Factual Report

August 22, 2017

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Chief Medical Officer

A. ACCIDENT: CEN16FA042; Sandia Park, NM

On November 16, 2015, at 1300 mountain standard time, a Cessna 182G, N2440R, impacted wooded mountainous terrain about 23 miles east of Albuquerque, New Mexico. The pilot and two passengers were fatally injured. The airplane was destroyed. The airplane was registered to and operated by Moore Aviation, LLC, Wichita Falls, Texas, under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 as a personal flight. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed at the accident site at time of the accident, and no flight plan had been filed. The cross country flight originated from Wichita Falls (KCWC), Texas, at 0937 central standard time, and was en route to Albuquerque (KAEG), New Mexico.

B. GROUP IDENTIFICATION

No group was formed for the medical evaluation in this accident.

C. DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

1. Purpose

This investigation was performed to evaluate the pilot for any medical conditions, the use of any medications/illicit drugs, and the presence of any toxins.

2. Methods

The FAA medical case review, toxicology results, autopsy report, personal medical records, and the investigator's reports were reviewed.

FAA Medical Case Review

According to the FAA medical case review, the 35 year old male pilot reported 500 total civilian flight hours at the time of his last aviation medical exam, dated 7/25/2013. At that time, he was 75 inches tall, weighed 195 pounds, and reported no chronic medical conditions and no

medications to the FAA. He was issued a second class medical certificate without limitations.

Autopsy

According to the autopsy performed by the University of New Mexico, Office of the Medical Investigator, the cause of death was blunt trauma and the manner of death was accident. No significant natural disease was identified.

Toxicology

Toxicology testing performed by the FAA's Bioaeronautical Research Sciences Laboratory identified sertraline and its metabolite desmethylsertraline in liver tissue and heart blood. The level of sertraline in the heart blood was 0.326 ug/ml.

Sertraline is an antidepressant often marketed with the name Zoloft. It carries this recommendation to patients regarding its effects on performance, "Patients should be told that although sertraline hydrochloride has not been shown to impair the ability of normal subjects to perform tasks requiring complex motor and mental skills in laboratory experiments, drugs that act upon the central nervous system may affect some individuals adversely. Therefore, patients should be told that until they learn how they respond to sertraline hydrochloride they should be careful doing activities when they need to be alert, such as driving a car or operating machinery."¹

Personal Medical Records

According to records obtained from the Veteran's Administration Medical Center where the pilot received medical care, he had undergone a surgical procedure to replace a disc in his neck in 2010 and had recurrent pain radiating down his arm that was treated without surgery. In addition, he had been diagnosed with major depression and treated with sertraline, beginning in August 2013. He was initially treated with alprazolam as needed for anxiety as well. Alprazolam, often marketed with the name Xanax, is a sedating benzodiazepine available by prescription as a Schedule IV controlled substance, that carries this recommended information regarding performance, "Because of its CNS depressant effects, patients receiving alprazolam tablets should be cautioned against engaging in hazardous occupations or activities requiring complete mental alertness such as operating machinery or driving a motor vehicle. For the same reason, patients should be cautioned about the simultaneous

¹ National Institutes of Health. US National Library of Medicine. DailyMed. Sertraline tablets. <https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=a8b2ad71-cfdc-4a29-8194-deefea138b16> Accessed 5/8/2017.

ingestion of alcohol and other CNS depressant drugs during treatment with alprazolam tablets.”²

During a mental health appointment in May 2015, the pilot’s depression was found to be well controlled. Specifically, it states, “positive mood,” “no depressive symptoms,” and “anxiety is well controlled.” At the time, the pilot was maintained on sertraline.

D. SUMMARY OF MEDICAL FINDINGS

The 35 year old male pilot had reported no medical problems and no medications to the FAA. According to the autopsy performed by the University of New Mexico, Office of the Medical Investigator, the cause of death was blunt trauma and the manner of death was accident. No significant natural disease was identified by autopsy. The pilot’s personal records revealed a history of cervical spine surgery and major depression treated with sertraline around the time of the accident. Toxicology testing identified sertraline and its metabolite desmethylsertraline in liver and heart blood. The level of sertraline in the heart blood was 0.326 ug/ml. Sertraline is not generally considered to be impairing, although it carries a warning about performance. A few months before the accident, the pilot’s health care provider felt his depression was well controlled.

² National Institutes of Health. US National Library of Medicine. DailyMed. Alprazolam tablets. <https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=2238e083-08f2-0aa8-59b7-16b6d68dbd48> Accessed 5/8/2017.