How to Fly Reliably Alert

By: Matthew van Wollen

Chief Financial Officer, Pulsar Informatics, Inc.

We've all had it happen. You're very tired, perhaps after having worked a long day. You're awake and listening to someone else who is speaking. But you seem to have missed a large chunk of what they were saying. It's as if your brain went to sleep while your eyes were still open—a so-called lapse of attention.

Clearly, you don't want to be in a safety-sensitive situation when a lapse of attention occurs. For your own safety and that of your passengers and fellow crew, it is imperative that you be reliably alert throughout your duty period. But how do you go about ensuring alertness?

Alertness Is a Shared Responsibility

First, know that you are not alone in this task. Managing fatigue is a shared responsibility between the air operator and the flight crew. Your organization has the task of creating flight and duty schedules that allow sufficient time for rest. Your professional responsibility is to make use of your off-duty time to get the sleep that your body needs.

There are certainly lots of ways to spend your off-duty time. Start with the obligations of everyday life. Helping the kids with homework, attending to a sick family member, fixing that leaky faucet—these are examples that may be familiar to you. Have a new baby at home? Are you taking online courses at an e-university? All these responsibilities place real demands on your time, and sometimes you may end up cutting into time that would normally be allocated for sleep.

Then there are the lifestyle choices you make. Probably the biggest culprit here is online TV and movies. The content streaming companies are generating a seemingly limitless supply of quality entertainment in their battle for your attention. Binging on a good show has never been easier.

Opportunities to get the sleep you need may be restricted in other ways, too. Traffic congestion when driving to or from the airport may add many minutes to your commute. Or perhaps you need to fly to the airport where you report for duty as no crew members were available for pre-positioning.

Objective Measures of Fatigue are Crucial

The fact is, you know sleep is important but it's all too easy to let other things interfere with getting enough sleep. And what does "enough" mean, anyway? How do you know you are alert enough to perform your duty?

Using your own judgment of your fitness for duty can be problematic and unreliable. Studies have shown that when people carry sleep debt, they systematically underestimate their degree of impairment. In other words, they tend to feel more alert than they really are. What is needed is an objective metric that is unaffected by personal perceptions or bias.

Pulsar Informatics has been developing and operationalizing objective metrics of fatigue for nearly two decades. Our technologies are grounded in science and supported by peer-reviewed research. Data from large-scale operational studies show that objective metrics of fatigue are highly correlated with safety performance indicators. As such, they are reliable indicators of fitness for duty, so you can answer the question "Am I alert enough?" Contact us today to learn how you can quantify alertness and promote safety in your operation with Pulsar's proven, data-driven fatigue risk management solutions.

Pulsar Informatics, Inc.

Pulsar Informatics is an IS-BAO I3SA certified company specializing in systems that help organizations reduce fatigue-related risk and achieve peak performance. Fleet Insight enables safety managers and schedulers to proactively evaluate fatigue across their entire operation's schedule and formulate mitigation strategies. Fatigue Meter Pro Planner is used by pilots, flight attendants, and maintenance personnel to evaluate their individual flight and duty schedule.
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