

PIAA Newsbriefs

NATIONAL NEWS

Pilots Teaching Patient Safety at Hospitals

During the last five years a growing number of major medical centers have hired professional pilots to instruct their staff on how to apply aviation safety practices to their work. According to the *New York Times*, this trend was spurred by a 1999 report by the Institute of Medicine, titled "To Err is Human," which reported that as many as 98,000 patients die each year from preventable medical errors. Similar to plane crashes, the *Times* found the majority of medical errors are a result of human error, particularly failures in communication, leadership, and decision making. Pilots are hired to speak to hospital staff about standard cockpit procedures including communication protocols, checklists, and crew briefings, which transfer over into improving patient care. Published research by the *British Medical Journal*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and the *Journal of Critical Care*, found hospitals that adopt aviation inspired practices have fewer malpractice suits and post-surgical infections. The research also suggests the practices lead to faster patient recovery and greater employee satisfaction. Concern about training programs developed by pilots with little knowledge of healthcare realities have led to programs such as LifeWings. LifeWings has professional pilots and physicians developing their training materials and serving on their advisory boards. (*New York Times*, 10/31)

Editor's Note: The fourth quarter issue of the PIAA Physician Insurer Magazine features an article on the unique approach of the LifeWings program and its work with the Society of Thoracic Surgeons. Don't miss this issue which will be mailed in mid-November.