

NYC00FA039
MEDICAL INFORMATION

The following medical information was extracted by Dr. Mitchell A. Garber, NTSB Medical Officer, from the medical records maintained on the pilot by his HMO:

- 2/16/76 On "Adult Physical Examination" form, physician's notes indicate "Past Medical History: Migraine headaches – uses Fiorinal [butalbital (a barbiturate), aspirin, and caffeine] up to 2 times per week. Usually headaches occur with tension or missing meal. Lasts overnight without meds. No nausea or visual symptoms." "Analysis and Plan" indicates "... Headaches – tension vs. migraine, good relief from Fiorinal – continue. ..."
- 3/6/79 On "Adult Physical Examination" form, physician's notes under "Analysis and Plan indicate "Headaches - saw [neurologist] at Washington Hospital Center who felt no need for further diagnostic work-up. Has started biofeedback and thinks it's helping. For weeks, had Headaches 2 to 3 times per week. Since starting biofeedback, has had 1 per week or less. If combines with Fiorinal, Headache goes within 15 minutes. ..."
- 1/22/88 Physician's notes indicate "Long history of headaches. Past few days has had flu-like symptoms – and increased headaches. Plain Fiorinal takes care of them promptly. Has taken Fiorinal for them for years. ... I had treated him many years ago. I do not feel he abuses his meds. Assessment – migraine-type headaches. Plan – Fiorinal 30 Refill times 2."
- 6/3/89 Nurses note recording telephone consultation states under "Current/Chronic Health Problems" – "Migraine" and under "Current Medications" – "Fiorinal." Note indicates "States leaving country for 2 weeks, wanting enough medication til can get back to area. Patient takes Fiorinal tablets 1-2 tablets by mouth every 6 to 8 hours as needed for headache. # 20 telephone order ... called in."
- 7/16/89 Nurses note recording telephone consultation states under "Current/Chronic Health Problems" – "Migraine" and under "Current Medications" – "butalbital..". Note indicates "Severe Headache – history of migraines – headache for over 48 hours. Bilateral – frontal – no nausea. Vision normal. No extremity weakness. No relief with Tylenol or aspirin. Refuses to come in for evaluation – wants a refill only to last until can call internist in morning. Butalbital – 1 every 4 to 6 hours – 5 tablets – voice order ..."

No additional evaluations for headache were noted in the HMO records provided on the pilot, but records from the HMO's pharmacy indicated dispensation of over 6,000 tablets of Fiorinal or the generic equivalent from 1992 through October of 1999. HMO pharmacy records indicate that in 1999, the pilot was dispensed 100 tablets of Fiorinal or the generic equivalent on 8 separate occasions.

The following medical information was extracted by Dr. Mitchell A. Garber, NTSB Medical Officer, from the medical records maintained on the pilot by the FAA Aeromedical Certification Division:

11/1/99 – on Application for Airman Medical Certificate, under item 17.a. “Do You Currently Use Any Medication (Prescription or Nonprescription)?,” the pilot indicated “No.” Under item 18 “Medical History – HAVE YOU EVER IN YOUR LIFE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH, HAD, OR DO YOU PRESENTLY HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?,” the pilot indicated “No” next to the condition “Frequent or severe headaches.”

The same responses by the pilot are indicated on the items above for every Application for Airman Medical Certificate dating to 2/2/88, the earliest application in the pilot’s file.

The 1999 Physician’s Desk Reference ® includes the following information regarding Fiorinal:

INDICATIONS

Fiorinal (butalbital, aspirin, and caffeine) is indicated for the relief of the symptom complex of tension (or muscle contraction) headache. Evidence supporting the efficacy and safety of Fiorinal (butalbital, aspirin, and caffeine) in the treatment of multiple recurrent headaches is unavailable. Caution in this regard is required because butalbital is habit-forming and potentially abusable.

ADVERSE REACTIONS

The most frequent adverse reactions are drowsiness and dizziness. ...

The October 1999 FAA Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners notes (pp 62-63):

A history or the presence of any of the following conditions precludes the issuance of a medical certificate:

...2. Headache.

- a. Migraine
- b. Migraine equivalent
- c. Cluster headache
- d. Chronic tension headache
- e. Conversion headache

... Pain, in some conditions, may be acutely incapacitating. Chronic recurring headaches or pain syndromes often require medications for relief or prophylaxis. and in most instances, the use of such medications is disqualifying because they

may interfere with a pilot's alertness and functioning. The Examiner may issue a medical certificate to an applicant with a long standing history of headaches if mild, seldom requiring more than simple analgesics, occur infrequently, and are not incapacitating, and are not associated with neurological stigmata.

The exact same language is used in the September 1996 FAA Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners (p. 63), the guidance in effect immediately preceding the 1999 Guide.
