

12 Years on... Showcasing Singapore to the International Aerospace Medicine Fraternity

By Dr Gan Wee Hoe

The 58th International Congress of Aviation and Space Medicine (ICASM) returned to Singapore after 12 long years. The congress was held from 11-14 October this year at the Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre. ICASM is one of two largest annual scientific meetings on Aerospace Medicine globally, sponsored under the aegis of the International Academy of Aviation and Space Medicine. This year's congress was special as it marked the first time that ICASM is co-hosted with the Asia Pacific Congress of Aerospace Medicine (APCAM). The joint 58th ICASM-7th APCAM, organised by the Society of Aviation Medicine Singapore, saw the attendance of more than 250 participants from 47 countries. These comprised a good mix of military flight-surgeons, medical regulators from international and national civil aviation authorities, and private Aviation Medicine (AvMed) physicians.

Singapore first hosted the 46th ICASM back in 1998, when it was organised by the Medical Service of the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF). Since then, the AvMed fraternity in Singapore has grown more than five times in population, through the recruitment, training and nurturing of AvMed physicians in the RSAF. Concurrently, the practice and advancements in this domain of Medicine in Singapore – both Military and Civil AvMed – are making their presence felt in the international arena. This

includes operating one of the most advanced suites of Aviation Physiology Trainers (such as human centrifuge and spatial disorientation trainer) for pilot training by the RSAF, to leading the Ultra Long Range (ULR) Task Force and making inroads in the study of sleep and alertness in pilots over multiple time-zone crossings. The latter effort eventually led to Singapore breaking aviation frontiers when Singapore Airlines became the world's first airline to operate regularly scheduled, commercial ULR flights from Changi Airport to New York City's Newark Airport in June 2004. This reflects the rapid progress of the global aviation landscape, and the need for AvMed to evolve and keep pace, if not facilitate, the developments of the aviation industry.

It is therefore fitting that the theme for this year's ICASM is *A New Era of Relevance for Aerospace Medicine*, which highlights the need for AvMed to embrace a renewed relevance in today's world. The congress opening ceremony was officiated by Minister for Education and second Minister for Defence, Dr Ng Eng Hen. In his opening address, Dr Ng highlighted the advances and challenges faced by the world's aviation industry as a result of the explosive growth in commercial air travel that began in the latter half of the last century. This signalled the need to enhance the operator's professional performance and promote flight safety in

an increasingly busy and complex airspace environment, as well as to find effective and efficient solutions to contain the rapid trans-border spread of infectious diseases brought about by globalised air travel.

The 58th ICASM's Andre Allard Memorial Lecture was given by Professor Chee Yam Cheng. Entitled "To Be The Best: Striving for Excellence in Aviation", Prof Chee highlighted the many similarities between the healthcare and aviation industries, but yet flying is proven to be ultra-safe, whereas the Institute of Medicine report in the United States classified healthcare as dangerous. As he so aptly pointed out, "Safety and security are challenges for us in health and aviation. Health systems, in order to achieve excellence, can continue to learn from aviation."

The four-day congress, comprising sessions such as "Infectious Diseases and International Air Travel", "Aeromedical Policies and Regulations" and "Human Factors and Safety in Aviation", focused the attention on addressing pressing issues facing the aviation industry today. It provided a platform that promoted discourse amongst AvMed practitioners within the region and beyond. Perhaps as an aside, though not insignificantly, it also showcased to the international fraternity Singapore's progress in this field of Medicine since her first and last introduction 12 years ago. **SMA**



Minister for Education and 2nd Minister for Defence, Dr Ng Eng Hen, officiating at the opening of the trade exhibition for the 58th ICASM.