Introduction:
The field of aviation medicine has a significant impact on the health and safety of passengers and crew members. The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) have both expressed concern over the lack of formal training in aviation medicine for GPs. This study aimed to assess the level of confidence GPs feel when advising patients regarding their fitness to fly and to explore their knowledge and understanding of the topic.

Methods:
A short survey was created using the SurveyMonkey website and data collected from qualified doctors through local (CGG/trainer groups) and online methods (private online forum). This assessed whether they had any training in aviation medicine and their confidence in giving information on fitness to fly and where to direct patients to with queries they felt unable to answer. The survey was completed within a 3 day period during August 2016. The survey had 88 respondents who took part fully.

Results:
The average self-reported confidence of GPs on an ordinal scale from 1-10 (1 - least confident, 10- most confident) was 3.8 (SEM 0.354). Non-GPs & GP trainees mean self-reported confidence was 3.5 (SEM 0.427). Doctors who had completed formal training in aviation medicine reported mean confidence of 6.0 (SEM 1.47). Knowledge regarding where to signpost patients was also generally poor amongst doctors without formal training.

Discussion:
The Royal College of General Practitioners curriculum contains no demonstrable competencies relating to knowledge of aviation or travel medicine. Whilst it may be desirable that patients with specific questions regarding their fitness to fly communicate directly with their airline, the patient's GP is likely to be the first point of contact; additional medical aviation services may struggle if GPs were unavailable to answer them on an informal basis or unsure where to signpost to as is suspected to be happening currently. In light of the findings from this study, clearly there is a need for further analysis of how to improve the confidence and teaching of aviation medicine and travel medicine in the GP curriculum.

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