



Australasian Society of Aviation Medicine – History

On 25 November 1949, the inaugural meeting of the Special Group on Aviation Medicine of the British Medical Association of Australia was held in Melbourne, Victoria. A committee was formed to set out the objects of the Group and its by-laws. The fifteen doctors present at this first meeting were appointed Foundation Members of the Group.

Over the next several years, annual meetings of the Special Group were held, scientific papers were presented, a newsletter began in 1954, and membership grew to 164 by 1962. That year, by a vote of the members, the Special Group's name was changed to The Aviation Medical Society of Australia. In 1968, The Society held its first scientific symposium at the University of Adelaide, and in 1972 hosted the Second International Meeting on Aerospace Medicine in Melbourne. By 1972, membership had increased to 258, and due to a large number of members joining from New Zealand, the Society was renamed the Aviation Medical Society of Australia and New Zealand (AMSANZ), and was incorporated formally in 1978. The objects of the Society, as stated in the Society's Rules, were then, and remain today:

1. The cultivation and promotion of aerospace medicine and related disciplines
2. The provision of an authoritative body of opinion in relation to aerospace medicine
3. The above objects may be supported by various activities, including (but not limited to) the following:
4. The holding of periodic meetings of members
5. The collection and dissemination by or among members of scientific knowledge and the publication of articles related to aerospace medicine and related sciences and of its meetings
6. The conducting of essay or other appropriate competitions open to medical or science undergraduates
7. The endowment and support of research and development of aerospace medicine; and
8. The co-operation, affiliation or holding of combined conferences with bodies having similar objects, within Australasia or elsewhere.

In 1979 the Patterson Trust Visiting Lecturer Trust Fund was officially established to sponsor the Society's educational activities. It was named after Mr Douglas Patterson, then Chairman of National Airways Corporation of New Zealand, who had supported and contributed significantly to the Society's activities. The Patterson Trust continues to this day, and funds eminent experts in the field to attend both New Zealand and Australian Scientific Meetings.

In 1982, the newsletter was renamed Avmedia. Also, application was made to the Aerospace Medical Association for affiliation, which was approved in 1984. In 1985, it was recommended by the aviation medicine regulatory authorities in Australia and New Zealand that all Designated Aviation Medical Examiners should be members of AMSANZ. Total membership had grown at that time to about 630.

A milestone event was the 36th International Congress of Aviation and Space Medicine (ICASM), which was held in conjunction with the Society's Annual Scientific meeting in 1988 in Brisbane, Queensland. This was repeated more recently, when in 2002 AMSANZ successfully hosted the 50th ICASM in Sydney. 1988 also saw the establishment of the John Lane Trust, which like the Patterson Trust, was intended to sponsor educational activities such as high-profile keynote speakers at Annual Scientific Meetings. Dr. John Lane was a foundation member of the Society, and is widely considered to be the father of aviation medicine in Australia. An ex-Royal Australian Air Force medical officer, the inaugural director of civil aviation medicine in 1948, a medical adviser to NASA, and a pioneer in transport restraint systems, Dr Lane died in January 1999, aged 81.

By 1991, the New Zealand Branch of the Society was beginning to seek greater autonomy. This culminated, in 1996, with the formal separation of the Australian and New Zealand branches of the Society into two distinct legal entities, but with very similar names - The Aviation Medical Society of Australia and New Zealand, and The Aviation Medical Society of Australia and New Zealand (New Zealand Inc.). This very confusing situation found resolution in 2003 when AMSANZ changed its name to the Australasian Society of Aerospace Medicine (ASAM). On the other side of the Tasman Sea, the New Zealand Society still remains The Aviation Medical Society of Australia and New Zealand (New Zealand Inc.) as an entity in its own right.

As it stands today the Australasian Society of Aerospace Medicine has about 870 members from many different countries. Avmedia, which has now become the Journal of the Australasian Society of Aerospace Medicine, is produced twice a year, and for the first time in 2004 it evolved into a peer-reviewed publication.

From its origin as a small Special Interest Group 57 years ago, the Australasian Society of Aerospace Medicine has developed into a large professional Society, which aims to promote the science of Aerospace Medicine, and support the vitally important aerospace industry in the region. ASAM will continue to have an important role, as it is clear that aerospace technology will continue to advance and challenge human physiology as we move further into the new century.