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"DOCTOR AT SEA" a monthly Column in The Islander Magazine

Fit For Seafaring

This column has been run by Dr Ian Marshall for a number of years and, for the past couple of months, Dr David Irons has looked after the shop till my wife Rosemary and I were able to come at the end of March. I have been an MCA-approved doctor in Tyneside in England since 1991 and we have now taken over the work based at Club de Mar Medical Centre. Rosemary is also a doctor and we both plan to run the MCA-approved Courses on First Aid and for Medical Care on Board Ship. Rosemary also has a longstanding interest in women's medicine, in particular osteoporosis and hormone replacement treatment as well contraceptive care and sexual health.

The spectrum of occupational background is dramatically different here in Palma. The majority of ENG1 candidates in Tyneside were from the North Sea offshore support industry and also worldwide shipping, particularly tankers, as well as young cadets starting their training at the local Marine College in South Shields. Obesity and high blood pressure as well as chronic diseases of middle age were much more common. Many of the candidates here in Palma know their height and weight like their date of birth and the majority are youthful super-fit individuals who will also soon be sporting radiant tans and should have little difficulty meeting the MCA standards of fitness for their ENG1 medical certificate.

The standards of fitness are constantly under revision and I have just received the latest changes. These clarify that the Regulations apply to "Yachts – may be motor or sail, for commercial or pleasure use. Medical standards apply only to commercial yachts or any paid crew of pleasure yachts"

The medical still lasts about half an hour and involves a questionnaire, medical examination, urine testing, colour vision assessment and vision testing (with and without glasses or contact lenses) for distant and near sight. It is essential to provide photo-ID and the recent revisions insist that the original last ENG1 be presented as evidence and be kept with the seafarer's records. Any gap between the expiry date of the previous certificate and the date of the current medical should be queried and a written explanation from the seafarer is required if he/she is unable to provide the previous certificate. The MCA is to be informed if any employer refuses to provide the seafarer with the original.

There are further guidance notes on asthma in new recruits to seafaring and also some cautious guidance on seafarers on warfarin or other anticoagulants. The ENG1 Certificate is issued by the Approved Doctor and is valid for up to two years, at the doctor's discretion. Illness resulting in inability to work for 30 days must be reported to an Approved Doctor, preferably the one who issued the certificate.

The MCA Medical does ensure that seafarers have a certain basic level of fitness and, in my experience, has been useful in picking up a number of otherwise undetected conditions, notably raised blood pressure, but also heart murmurs, diabetes or blood in urine. I hope I will be able to apply the MCA Standards sensibly and continue the excellent service provided by Ian and David.

*Dr Ken Prudhoe, MCA Approved Doctor, can be contacted at Club de Mar Medical Centre, Palma de Mallorca.
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