



What lead you to a career based in Aviation Medicine?

After some trial and error I studied a Bachelor of Science degree at the down to earth Massey University. I dropped out of the first as it just wasn't suited to me. The environment there was enough to set me on the path to medicine and so I completed a medical degree at Otago University in Dunedin. I moved to Palmerston North Hospital with the idea of training as a cardiologist but, through a twist of fate, my pilot's exams coincided with the specialist exams and the pilot's exams won out.

From there I went to the RNZAF Officer Training Course and become the Base Medical Officer at RNZAF Base Ohakea but was not really the military type. So off I went to start the Bulls Medical Centre located in Bulls – a town right next to the Ohakea Air Force Base. And on it's gone from there!

Where did you get the idea for the business?

The idea of doing pilot medicals at remote South Island air strips began from the hunting interests my son and I share in south Westland. We spent a lot of time with the Saxtons' at Haast during the roaring season and with this I soon started to do the local pilots' medicals. It soon dawned on me that if I was able to fly down to these remote airstrips and do the pilots medicals on the spot, there are a number of advantages for both the pilots and myself.

The advantages to the pilots include cost-savings in travel/ time off, convenience and the comfort of doing a medical in familiar surroundings.

The advantages to me are simple: following the dream of combining my medical profession with flying in the most beautiful parts of the world.

What aspect of the business do you particularly enjoy?

I love working closely with my son, who has quite a head for business and a helicopter license, along with my two daughters who are both on the payroll and help keep the place going. I have a really good relationship with them, I think because I get to be with them as equals and as mates, as much as a father. It's a whole new dimension to our relationship and something unique about the way our lives are set up.

What about your clients?

My patients include about one quarter of New Zealand's pilots, which consist of some of the best pilots in the world, especially when it comes to remote and mountainous flying. They are very much like the pilots found around Alaska and such places. It is a privilege to know them.

Dr David Baldwin.

Age: Young at heart.

Location: Somewhere over New Zealand, usually Palmerston North.



Tell us about your facilities.

The base serves as a hangar, administration building, lecture theatre, book distributor and sometimes even a search and rescue centre. It's a really dynamic place and it is always busy. My beloved Cessna lives in there when we are home.

Are you very fond of your aircraft?

My Cessna 172 Hawk XP2 is registered RJG which we call, 'Really Jolly Good'. Its constant speed is with a modest 210hp continental engine, fully IFR with HF radio and a satellite tracking unit. I love it because it carries a lot and makes my life easier. I have been in jets and done all that, but my Cessna is like a hand in a glove after 2000 flying hours. It will cruise at 10,000 feet IFR or go low and slow and virtually won't stall. I am a Cessna man through and through.

What sort of flying conditions do you encounter?

In New Zealand we get a lot of ice, turbulence and tricky landing strips. You have to be particularly careful on the west coast of the South Island where there are lots of mountains. Some strips have one way in and one way out and if the wind isn't in your favour you can end up quite fast on approach.

What is your favourite bit of equipment?

That's got to be the auto pilot. Altitude and heading hold means that the longer legs can be spent having a coffee and not working too hard, because when I land and get to work it is a very busy day.

Does the Bulls Flying Doctor Service plan on expanding in the future?

We are always flexible and thinking of new ways to improve our service or add a new dimension but it is important to us to keep our core business of providing a mobile medical service and running Bulls Medical Centre. We hope to create a TV programme in the future which might help us fund our own helicopter.

Do you have much association with aviation in Australia?

I cherish being associated with the Australian Aerospace Medical Society. I really enjoy the fellowship there and the vast array of highly respected professionals I get to associate with. There are people from the Australian Military, Royal Flying Doctor Service, even NASA. I believe it's important to have that link and I am very grateful for that opportunity.

Any advice for other aviators?

Start with the basics: a good place to live, like Bulls, be physically well and have a positive attitude. If you have those then everything else is easy.