

MERCHANT MARINER MEDICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MEDMAC)

Additional Guidance on Conduct of the General Medical Exam

TASK STATEMENT 19-30 ACTION SHEET

TASK DESCRIPTION: ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON CONDUCT OF THE GENERAL MEDICAL EXAM

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Title 46 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 10.304 (a) requires that the merchant mariner general medical exam “be documented and of such scope to ensure that there are no conditions that pose significant risk of sudden incapacitation or debilitating complication.” The current medical evaluation guidance does not include guidance on conduct of the general medical examination, and many medical practitioners are unclear on what elements should be included in the exam to ensure that the mariner has no high-risk conditions. Some medical practitioners consider only those medical conditions disclosed by the mariner when conducting the medical exam; however over reliance on this approach risks missing high-risk conditions that the mariner is reluctant to disclose, as well as conditions of which the mariner may be unaware.

MEDMAC previously recommended that the general medical examination should include screening for the high-risk conditions of obstructive sleep apnea, diabetes mellitus and coronary artery disease, and this guidance has been included in the draft Merchant Mariner Medical Manual. Public comments received in response to the draft Medical Manual and other industry feedback suggest that it may be helpful for the Coast Guard to provide additional guidance on screening to detect other high-risk conditions including impairing mental health conditions, dental health concerns, and conditions that impair cognitive ability (dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, for example). The Coast Guard seeks recommendations for additional guidance on conduct of the general medical exam.

BACKGROUND:

The Medical and Physical Evaluation Guidelines for Merchant Mariner Credentials are contained in Navigation and Vessel Inspection Circular (NVIC) 04-08. NVIC 04-08 provides guidance on conduct of the Demonstration of Physical Ability evaluation and guidance on conditions that are subject to further review. However, NVIC 04-08 does not provide guidance on conduct of the general medical exam, nor does it specify the extent of exam considered minimally sufficient to ensure that mariners are free of conditions that pose a significant risk of sudden incapacitation or debilitating complication. Likewise, the Merchant Mariner Credential Medical Evaluation Report, CG-719K, requests documentation of known and/or reported medical conditions. However, the exam elements queried on the CG-719K form are unlikely to be sufficient to screen for previously undiagnosed, or undisclosed, conditions that pose a risk of sudden incapacitation. MEDMAC previously provided recommendations that the general medical exam should include screening for the conditions of obstructive sleep apnea, diabetes mellitus and coronary artery disease because these conditions are high-risk and common, and they are amenable to office-based screening strategies. Detecting these conditions through screening also provides mariners the opportunity to seek treatment for the condition and reduce the risk of impairing complications. Examples of other common conditions that pose risk of sudden incapacitation or debilitating complication, and that are amenable to office-based screening strategies include mental health conditions, dental health conditions and conditions that impair cognitive ability. Input from the public and the maritime industry indicate the need for guidance on screening for these conditions during the general medical exam.

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DESCRIPTION OF TASK:

Provide recommendations to the Coast Guard for guidance on the conduct of general medical exams.

1. Provide recommendations for critical exam elements to screen for mental health conditions.
2. Provide recommendations for critical exam elements to screen for dental health concerns.
3. Provide recommendations for critical exam elements to screen for cognitive impairment.
4. Provide recommendations for critical exam elements to screen for other conditions that may pose a significant risk for sudden incapacitation or debilitating complication.

Provide comments/recommendations to the Coast Guard by the close of the Spring, 2020 MEDMAC meeting.

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Annex to Task 19-30

MISSION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON CONDUCT OF THE GENERAL MEDICAL EXAM

The Merchant Mariner Medical Advisory Committee (MEDMAC) hereby establishes the General Medical Exam as a standing Working Group.

The Working Group shall make recommendations to the MEDMAC for the purpose of refining the current statutory requirements.

The Working Group shall respond to specific task assignments requested by the Coast Guard or the Chair of the MEDMAC.

The Working Group shall make recommendations to the MEDMAC in the form of specific written reports.

In carrying out its work the following guiding principles apply:

1. The Working Group shall be chaired by one member of MEDMAC.
2. The Working Group may have participation from the public and other interested parties.
3. Meetings of the Working Group shall occur at regular meetings of the MEDMAC at a minimum. Additional meetings may be called by the Working Group Chair or at the request of the MEDMAC Chair of the Coast Guard. All meetings of the Working Group will be announced in the Federal Register.
4. Meetings of the Working Group should be guided by Roberts Rules of Order and the Working Group Chairman shall organize and conduct the meetings. In the absence of the Chairman, another MEDMAC member from the Working Group shall act as Working Group Chair.
5. The Working Group shall recognize the work and recommendations from previous Working Group work.