

INTERNATIONAL MARITIME HEALTH ASSOCIATION (IMHA) WORKSHOP FOR THE REVIEW OF APPENDIX E OF THE ILO/IMO GUIDELINES ON THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION FOR SEAFARERS

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From February 18–20, 2025, the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA) held a workshop to review Appendix E of the ILO/IMO Guidelines on the Medical Examination for Seafarers, at the UK Maritime and Coastguard Agency offices in Southampton. This initiative was built on discussions at the International Symposium on Maritime Health in Athens 2023 and the Joint ILO/IMO meeting held in February 2024.

The workshop brought together experts from various sectors of the maritime medical field, including regulatory bodies, academic institutions, and practising physicians. For three days, participants discussed a range of pressing issues, such as evolving medical conditions, advancements in treatments, and the practical application of medical guidelines in the unique environment of seafaring.

Dr. Rob Verbist opened the workshop by highlighting the importance of this review and how, as regulatory frameworks like the STCW Convention undergo revision, maritime medical guidelines must be reviewed as well. The session focused on the importance of balancing stringent medical requirements with practical considerations for both seafarers and the industry. The author of the current guidelines for the medical examination of seafarers, Dr Tim Carter, gave a presentation on its history and detailed the process that was required to implement them back in 2013. He outlined some of the health and administrative issues faced including eyesight, hearing, physical capability, thresholds for action, existing national standards and minimum standards as opposed to definitive ones.

Among the debated topics were **obesity, vision standards, diabetes, and the impact of new medications** such as biologics and anticoagulants. Discussions highlighted the need for evidence-based guidelines that accommodate modern medicine while ensuring seafarers' fitness for duty. The workshop also addressed conditions such as **renal disease, epilepsy, malignancies, and substance use**, with experts emphasizing the need for more nuanced assessments. The group acknowledged that existing guidelines often overlook individual risk factors and emerging treatment options.

As the workshop concluded, there was a shared sense of responsibility where medical guidelines for seafarers must strike a careful balance – protecting both individual seafarers and the operational safety of vessels. With the rapid pace of medical advancements, the maritime industry faces an opportunity to future-proof its medical fitness criteria, ensuring that seafarers are both **healthy and supported** throughout their careers.



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