

Missing The Airport

Bruce Campbell, MD



"... [Former Delta pilot] Bill Mazzone, who flew jet airliners for 23 years, said it's just as possible they got caught napping. "It's kind of like being in an operating room. You know the physicians and the nurses...are listening to music, telling jokes, they're doing what keeps them alert," he said. "Things are happening that if the public knew about it, they wouldn't understand it, but it's done. They've got the same thing in the cockpit."

- *Associated Press story, "Could Letting Pilots Take a Nap Make Flying Safer?" which appeared after a Northwest Airlines flight missed Minneapolis. (Published 10-24-2009)*

When I was in medical school many years ago, I was assigned to a surgical service that also had two first-year surgical residents known as "the interns." As a medical student, I was required to stay in the hospital every few nights to help one of them.

Internship was very demanding. The young, newly minted physicians were exhausted from being on-call every other night. Much of the night work was of no educational benefit. Each lab and X-ray report needed to be tracked down from a different corner of the building. All night long, they walked all over the hospital preparing for morning rounds. Just when the interns thought their work was completed, they would get called by the Emergency Room or the floor to see a patient, start an IV, replace a urinary catheter, draw blood, or disimpact a rectum (don't ask). As the interns stumbled through their assigned tasks the next day, one of the senior physicians would invariably tell them how much easier things had gotten over the years. At the time, I remember dreading my own upcoming internship.

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