

Real Voices interview: Brigitte Godard

Meet Brigitte, a flight surgeon with the European Space Agency

What does a flight surgeon do?

I act as general practitioner (GP) for astronauts.

What's your average day like?

I have one main patient. Right now, it's Samantha Cristoforetti, an Italian astronaut on the International Space Station [pictured here with Brigitte]. Right now, it is a quiet time when all is going well from a medical perspective, but things can become more difficult. I talk with Samantha once a week for 15 minutes. I receive and review data from medical exams and do a lot of reporting.

When is it busiest?

Three months before launch and after return. There is a lot of travel, and dealing with medical issues can be stressful. Samantha will land in Kazakhstan, where I will pick her up with the other crew member, and will return directly to Houston, Texas, USA, where all post-flight medical and science exam has to be done (all preflight was collected in Houston).

What are the common medical issues?

Pain, usually the back or legs. Astronauts exercise a lot but it isn't always enough. Sleep, either falling asleep or waking too early. Space motion sickness, usually at the beginning; luckily, it wasn't a problem for Samantha.

What is your favourite part?

Launch is something very stressful but so beautiful when you see the rocket going in the sky.



Brigitte Godard with Samantha Cristoforetti

Credit: Brigitte Godard

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

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What was your career path?

I wanted to be an astronaut but my eyes were not good enough. I studied to be a medical doctor, but looked out for any medical activities related to space. In 2005, Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales – the French Space Agency – was looking for a physician to work in a bed-rest study for healthy volunteers. I then worked on European astronaut selection. Eventually I was offered a flight surgeon position. After one week, I knew it was right for me.

What advice would you give to others?

Do all of the space-related lessons you can. As well as being a doctor, you need knowledge of space. Look for short courses, diplomas and Master's.

Do you still want to go to space?

A long time ago I did a parabolic flight and got really sick. I tried another recently and was really sick again. So maybe it's not for me.

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