



Roundtable I: Who Gets to Fly? Speaker Biographies

*Bioethics in Commercial Space Travel:
Charting Humanity's Next Frontier*

**December 18, 2025
12:00–1:30 p.m. Eastern
Via Zoom**



DR. CHRISTOPHER FLYNN
Center for Performance & Behavioral
Health Consultations PLLC
Discussant

Dr. Christopher Flynn is a seasoned Aerospace (& FAA HIMS), Operational and Clinical Psychiatrist; with broad national and international experience in delivering: outpatient, hospital, aerospace and high-reliability performer psychiatry and fitness for duty assessments; as well as mental health treatment. Chris is a current consultant with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), NASA, Axiom Space, Allied Pilots Association, United Airlines and MedStar Washington Hospital Center. Most recently, he was a FAA Assistant Chief Psychiatrist, where he provided return to flying status recommendations to the US Federal Air Surgeon on more than 4000 cases and 2200 aviators. As a past USAF Senior Flight Surgeon for 21 years, Chris supported aircrew in five military aircraft (C-5, C-130, C-26, F-16, T-38). He was also a NASA operational psychiatrist, flight surgeon and ISS crew surgeon (1996-2004).

He is an author/co-author of twelve peer reviewed articles and seven aerospace psychiatry-focused book chapters; and has earned numerous awards for his service excellence. Chris is a Board-Certified Adult Psychiatrist, past US Department of State Regional Psychiatrist and Director of Mental Health Services. Chris is a Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, Fellow of the Aerospace Medicine Association, Fellow and Secretary of the Civil Aviation Medical Association, and a member of the American College of Psychiatrists.



DR. MIKE HARRISON
Mayo Clinic
Discussant

Dr. Harrison practices medicine as faculty at Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida, in the Departments of Emergency Medicine, Critical Care Medicine, and Aerospace Medicine; and he is the Chief Medical Officer at Axiom Space in Houston, Texas.

He has served as a flight surgeon supporting multiple commercial spaceflight missions with companies including SpaceX, Virgin Galactic, and Axiom Space. Dr. Harrison's research interests, stemming from his graduate education in exercise physiology and hyperbaric medicine, include spaceflight; military aviation; decompression sickness; and high-altitude physiology. He has published more than 30 peer-reviewed articles and received numerous research awards.



DR. RICHARD JENNINGS
University of Texas Medical
Branch
Discussant

Richard Jennings attended Oklahoma State University, the Oklahoma University College of Medicine and Wright State University. He completed residency training in obstetrics and gynecology and aerospace medicine. He served as a NASA flight surgeon from 1987-1995 and was the Chief of the Flight Medicine Clinic and Chief of Medical Operations-Space Shuttle. He served as crew surgeon or deputy crew surgeon for 14 Shuttle missions and provided direct mission support to 45 Space Shuttle flights. He provided medical care in the flight medicine clinic at JSC for 25 years.

In 1995 he joined the faculty at UTMB and served as director for the UTMB NASA-JSC aerospace medicine residency program. At UTMB he supervised the KBR-Wyle physicians that support NASA in operations and advanced projects at the Johnson Space Center, Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center, and Kazakhstan. As a flight surgeon for Space Adventures, he led the medical certification process for seven Soyuz missions and served as crew surgeon for five missions to the ISS from Kazakhstan and Russia. He is currently professor emeritus in space medicine at UTMB. He has served as consultant to Sierra Space, SpaceX, Virgin Galactic, Axiom Space, and VAST. He is a previous president of the Aerospace Medical Association, serves on the board of the Aerospace Medical Association Foundation, and was a Nonresident Fellow in Space Policy at the James A. Baker Institute at Rice University.



DR. SMITH JOHNSTON
SolaMed Solutions
Subject Matter Expert

Dr. Johnston has spent most of his career as a Medical Officer and Operational Flight Surgeon for NASA's Medical Operations Branch at the Johnson Space Center. Over 35 years, he supported the medical care of the Astronaut Corps, their families, and retired astronauts. He provided operational support for two ISS Expedition missions and more than 25 Shuttle missions, including Neurolab STS-90, the Hubble repair missions STS-91 and STS-109, and the STS-107 Columbia mission. In his final years at NASA, he served as Medical Director of the Aerospace and Occupational Medicine Clinics and led NASA's Astronaut Medical Selection and Retention Standards, as well as programs in fatigue management, human health, performance, and longevity.

He became Axiom Space's first Chief Medical Officer in 2019 and retired after the successful Ax-1 mission, the first commercial crewed mission to the ISS. He recently joined the Aerospace Medicine faculty at the University of Central Florida and serves as Director of Health Innovation at SOLAMED Solutions, in addition to consulting for multiple commercial companies.

Dr. Johnston has authored over 100 publications and eight book chapters and has received major honors including the NASA Distinguished and Exceptional Service Medals, the Society of NASA Flight Surgeons Lovelace Award (2011), the Space Medicine Association Lifetime Achievement Award (2012), and the Kerwin Award (2021). Board-certified in Aerospace Medicine, he is an Emeritus Fellow of the Aerospace Medical Association. His educational work on space medicine and its applications to human health has been featured widely, including in NOVA, Discovery Channel, Scientific American, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and numerous podcasts.



DR. SARALYN MARK
SolaMed Solutions
Moderator

Saralyn Mark, MD, FAMWA, is an endocrinologist and women's health specialist and the founder and CEO of **SolaMed Solutions**, including its space medicine subsidiary. She is also the founder of **iGIANT®**, a nonprofit focused on advancing sex- and gender-specific design.

Dr. Mark has served as a medical and scientific advisor to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, NASA, and other public- and private-sector organizations. She previously served as Senior Medical Advisor to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health and to NASA, where she contributed to initiatives spanning public health, emerging technologies, and human performance in space.

She is an adjunct Associate Professor at Yale and Georgetown Universities and a Distinguished Senior Fellow at George Mason University. Dr. Mark is the author of *Stellar Medicine* and has received multiple awards for distinguished public service.



DR. VASILIKI RAHIMZADEH
Baylor University College of
Medicine
Ethicist

Vasiliki Rahimzadeh, PhD, is an assistant professor of medical ethics and health policy at Baylor College of Medicine. Her National Institutes of Health-funded research program investigates the ethical, legal and social issues (ELSI) of sharing genomic and related health data on Earth and in space. She directs the Mission to Enhance Ethics Education, Outreach and Research in Space (METEORS) program where she contributes to evidence-based standards for human research protections in the commercial spaceflight industry and supports space medicine investigators navigate emerging ELSI in their work. She is also a standing member of the Bioethics Panel for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and chairs the Astro-Ethics Affinity Group through the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities. Dr. Rahimzadeh has a BS in microbial biology from the University of California Berkeley and earned a PhD with specialization in biomedical ethics from McGill University before completing a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University.



MEGAN SIEFFERT, ESQ.
Applied Materials
Discussant

Megan Sieffert is an aerospace, semiconductor, and advanced-technology attorney whose career bridges federal oversight, cutting-edge space programs, and high-growth commercial innovation. She currently serves as Segment Business Counsel at Applied Materials, guiding complex commercial, government, and technology transactions for global semiconductor and precision-manufacturing programs. Previously, she was Associate General Counsel at Vast and held senior in-house roles at Axiom Space and Slingshot Aerospace, supporting commercial space station development, astronaut missions, and national-security space software. Megan's foundation as an aerospace lawyer was forged at NASA's Office of Inspector General, where she helped safeguard federal resources by supporting investigations and oversight across NASA's Earth Science portfolio, launch services, and the Commercial Crew Program. She also maintains a robust pro bono practice advising scientific and aerospace startups at the pre-funding stage to accelerate innovation and expand access to space.



DR. WALTER SIPES
Consultant
Discussant

Walter Sipes, PhD is an experienced aerospace and operational psychologist who has provided several years of mental health support for individuals (US Air Force personnel, aircrew, astronauts) and their families. His own operational experience firstly as a US Army aviator include logging 500 combat flight hours in helicopters and later logging another 500 flight hours as an Air Force psychologist as the psychology Human Factors Consultant to the US Air Force Surgeon General. He has been a human factors consultant on 37 aircraft accident investigation boards. He participated in US and Canadian astronaut selection programs for 35 years and screening commercial spaceflight participants for 4 years. After he retired from the Air Force, he was a psychologist for NASA at Johnson Space Center for 15 years where he conducted training and psychological support/services for both Shuttle and ISS missions to astronauts and their families. He retired from NASA and as an independent contractor, he has had contracts with the Canadian Space Agency and Axiom Space. His research and publications have spanned topics of military pilot psychological test norms, spatial disorientation, psychological support for long-duration missions, cognitive performance in spaceflight, training ISS astronauts, and fatigue countermeasures for long duration spaceflight missions. He is currently on two international committees focused on developing medical standards for commercial passengers and on developing training standards for commercial spaceflight passengers.



DR. RAHUL SURESH
NASA
Discussant

Dr. Rahul Suresh is an operational Flight Surgeon at NASA's Johnson Space Center, where he supports the clinical care of astronauts and provides leadership in NASA's effort to commercialize low Earth orbit. Over his career, he has provided medical care and operational medical support for astronauts on multiple long-duration International Space Station missions, including Expeditions 61–62, 66–67, and 74–75. In addition, Dr. Suresh serves as a certified NASA Mission Control Specialist for Dragon launches and landings supporting Crewed flights from Hawthorne, California. Drawing on his hands-on mission experience, Dr. Suresh helps chart NASA's approach to ensuring safe and sustainable commercial operations in low Earth orbit. As Program Medical Officer for NASA's Commercial LEO Development Program, he leads efforts to define medical operations frameworks, health standards, and risk strategies that will guide NASA as it enables a greater role of industry in maintaining a continuous human presence in space with the retirement of the International Space Station. His work embodies the growing partnership between NASA and commercial providers—helping to translate decades of operational knowledge into a collaborative model that advances both safety and innovation. Dr. Suresh earned his medical degree from the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science in Rochester, Minnesota and completed a residency in Internal Medicine and Aerospace Medicine and earned a Master of Public Health at the University of Texas Medical Branch. He is board certified in Internal Medicine and Aerospace Medicine and continues to maintain an active clinical practice in Houston.



KONRAD SZOCIK
University of Information
Technology & Management
Ethicist

Konrad Szocik is a philosopher and bioethicist, and professor and vice-rector for research and international cooperation at the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów, Poland. His research focuses on the philosophy, ethics, and bioethics of space exploration, human enhancement, feminist bioethics, population ethics, and selected issues at the intersection of futures studies, technology, and the environmental crisis. He is the author of *The Bioethics of Space Exploration* (Oxford University Press, 2023) and *Feminist Bioethics in Space: Gender Inequality in Space Exploration* (Oxford University Press, 2024), as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters on space ethics, space bioethics, antinatalism, and climate-related existential risk. Previously, he was a Visiting Fellow at the Yale Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics (2021–2022).



DR. PAUL ROOT WOLPE
Emory University
Moderator

Paul Root Wolpe, Ph.D., is the Raymond Schinazi Distinguished Research Chair of Jewish Bioethics at Emory University and Professor of Medicine, Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Sociology, and Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology. After 16 years directing Emory's Center for Ethics, he is now building the university's Center for Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation (PACT). Dr. Wolpe spent 17 years as NASA's first Senior Bioethicist, shaping policies for human health in spaceflight, and served as the first National Bioethics Advisor to Planned Parenthood Federation of America. He is Past President of both the Association of Bioethics Program Directors and the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, and is a Fellow of the Hastings Center and the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. He received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters in 2019.

A national thought leader, Dr. Wolpe's work examines the ethical, social, and ideological impact of medicine and biotechnology. A founder of neuroethics and former Editor-in-Chief of *AJOB Neuroscience*, he was named one of Trust Across America's "Top 100 Thought Leaders in Trustworthy Business Behavior" and received the 2011 World Technology Network Award in Ethics, the 2022 Tzedek Award, and the 2025 Humanitarian Award from the International Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Author of more than 150 publications and over 500 invited presentations, Dr. Wolpe has been recognized as a Faculty Row "SuperProfessor" and a Teaching Company "Superstar Teacher." His TED Talk has over two million views, and he has been featured widely in media, including *60 Minutes* and a personal profile in the *New York Times Science Times*.



DR. MATTHEW WYNIA
University of Colorado
Ethicist

Dr. Wynia is a clinician-researcher and leader in bioethics with a history of exploring some of the most contentious ethical issues in health care, focusing on those related to the social roles of health professionals. He is a professor of medicine and of public health at the University of Colorado, where he directs the CU Center for Bioethics and Humanities.

Prior to his current role, he spent 18 years at the American Medical Association, where he led the AMA's Institute for Ethics and Center for Patient Safety, and he was the Director of Patient and Physician Engagement for the Improving Health Outcomes team. While there, he co-founded the Commission to End Health Care Disparities and he led the Project on the History of African-Americans and the Medical Profession that, in 2008, prompted the AMA's public apology for a legacy of racial discrimination and exclusion in organized medicine. He has served on advisory boards for the US DHHS Office of Minority, the Joint Commission, the American Board of Medical Specialties, American Board of Internal Medicine, and other national medical, public health and bioethics professional organizations. At the National Academies, he currently serves on the Board on Health Sciences Policy and has served on multiple consensus committees and chaired special projects on team-based care, transdisciplinary professionalism, and public health approaches to preventing ideologically-motivated violence.



LAURIE ZOLOTH
University of Chicago
Ethicist

Professor Laurie Zoloth holds the Margaret E. Burton Chair of Religion and Ethics at the University of Chicago. She has a distinguished career as a bioethicist and scholar of Jewish ethics, writing or editing 10 books, and over 350 articles. She was both President of the American Academy of Religion and President of the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities, receiving its Distinguished Service Award in 2007. She was a co-founder of the Society for Jewish Ethics and founding chair of the HHMI Bioethics Board. She served on the NASA National Advisory Council, for which she received the NASA National Public Service Award. She has served as both the dean of the Divinity School and as Senior Advisory on Social Ethics at the University of Chicago. Her honors include the Graduate Theological Union's alumna of the year, an honorary doctorate from the American Jewish University, the Engelhardt Award in Bioethics and the Borsch-Rast Book Award in Religion. She is a Fellow of the Hastings Center and a Life Member of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge. In addition to her 1999 book about justice and health care policy, [The Ethics of Encounter](#), and five edited books, her most recent books (2022-2023) are [Second Texts and Second Opinions: Essays toward a Jewish Bioethics](#) and [Ethics for the Coming Storm: Climate Change and Jewish Thought](#), both from Oxford University Press, and [May We Make the World?: Gene Drives, Malaria, and the Future of Nature](#), from MIT.