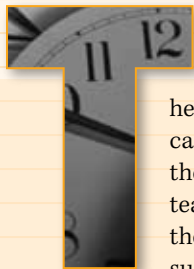


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A Day in the Life of Flight For LIFE



The pilots and medical professionals of the Flight For Life team work around the clock to make sure that those in need of immediate medical attention are transported to the hospital quickly and safely. You're in the passenger seat for this inside look at one day with Flight For Life.

12:40 a.m.

Flight For Life pilot Wade Tefft has just received clearance to depart Wichita's Jabara Airport. Aboard the Beechcraft King Air 200 fixed-wing plane are a 2-year-old boy with severe cardiac problems and his mother, respiratory therapist Craig Nuxoll, and Linda Stabler, R.N. Tefft informs the Flight For Life Communications Center at St. Anthony Central Hospital that all is go. The communications specialist on duty relays the message to the team manning Terra III, the Flight For Life ground ambulance dedicated to the transport of infants and

children. When the plane lands at Mayo Aviation at Centennial Airport shortly after 2 a.m., Terra III will be waiting to rush the medical crew and its young patient to The Children's Hospital.

Tefft's own 2-year-old, Tristan, is sleeping soundly at home. The parallel isn't lost on the pilot. "The air ambulance operation gives us an opportunity to make a difference in people's lives. It means much more to me to transport this child from Wichita to Denver than to fly gamblers to Las Vegas."

6:20 a.m.

Karen Percell, R.N., arrives at The Children's Hospital to begin her 12-hour shift as lead flight nurse with the Child and Newborn Transport Team. Minutes later, she's been updated by the night team and has checked the three color-coded supply bags that accompany the team on

every flight. The 100 pounds of equipment and medication they contain, plus a 250-pound isolette, can transform an airplane or ambulance into a neonatal intensive care unit.

Advance preparation is critical, Percell emphasizes. "We have only minutes from the time we get the initial page from the Flight For Life



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Communications Center to when we're on the road." Between transports, Percell serves as a resource for other Children's Hospital units—starting IVs, moving complex patients and providing relief to the cardiac and intensive care units.

Today, her first Flight For Life Colorado trip will be by helicopter to Greeley. A newborn boy diagnosed with atrial fibrillation—an abnormal cardiac rhythm—will need cardiac support not available outside of a tertiary hospital in the metro area. Percell, the team respiratory therapist and emergency medical technician, will provide that cardiac support and bring him back to a pediatric cardiac specialist at The Children's Hospital. Instead of surgery, transesophageal pacing will be employed, using a fine wire inserted down the baby's esophagus to deliver a corrective current.

10:12 a.m.

Eric Cross received his emergency medical technician (EMT) certification through the nationally recognized training program at St. Anthony Central Hospital. Having volunteered with Colorado's Blackhawk and Coal Creek fire districts prior to joining Flight For Life, Cross knows what the arrival of the emergency team means. "As a firefighter," he says, "it's such a relief when you see Flight For Life reach the scene and start caring for your patient."

"As an EMT, my priority is getting my team safely from point A to point B. Flight For Life has a very conservative driving protocol, because when you turn the lights and siren on, people go a little bit crazy out there. You have to be 120 percent alert. You have to react faster."

12:23 p.m.

Jason Carr has been a paramedic for nearly 16 years. Today, he's received positive responses from two nationally regarded physician assistant programs. He wants to take his professional life to the next level, and Flight For Life colleagues have been most supportive.

"The way I like to look at my coworkers—there are about 130 of us across the organization—is that we are the best of the best in this area. We take care of the sickest of the sick. And we set the bar very high."

Carr and flight nurse Kerry Parkinson have just returned from La Junta via a fixed-wing plane. "Our patient had been critically injured in a 30-foot fall—multisystem trauma. It's an excellent rural emergency room in the Arkansas Valley, and they had done a very good job to keep him alive. But their resources are limited. We worked with their staff for two hours and assisted in getting him stabilized. Then we brought him back to [St. Anthony] Central for trauma care. We gave him a chance."

5:57 p.m.

Garet Hickman is wrapping his 12-hour shift in the Flight For Life

Colorado Communications Center at St. Anthony Central Hospital. A "rockin' day" will mean 14 to 15 transports, Hickman says, "but today started slow." In no way, however, is "slow" synonymous with "not busy."

"We have two communications specialists on 24/7, each working a 12-hour shift," Hickman explains. "We manage about nine potential response teams with four helicopters, two fixed-wing airplanes, two ground-based units and the Newborn and Young Child Team out of Children's." This year, Flight For Life will record some 4,000 adult and pediatric transports across a nine-state area.

"We coordinate all requests from other hospitals and law enforcement agencies and disseminate that information to the appropriate team. The specifics of the case determines who's called. As for following the flight, if it's emergent and requires a helicopter, we'll be in touch every 10 minutes throughout the flight. If it's a ground vehicle, we'll be in contact every 30 minutes. Fixed-wing flights are managed mostly by air traffic control, but we're talking with them on both ends of the trip."

Hickman says goodnight to long-time communications specialist Kathryn Rhynsberger, then pauses to recap. "Flight For Life is the best job I've ever had, whether as a paramedic or directing the Comm Center. Sometimes it doesn't work out for our patients. But in every case, we're doing our very best to make a difference." ■

Founded by St. Anthony Hospitals in 1972, Flight For Life is the nation's first hospital-based air ambulance system and the model for hundreds of similar programs worldwide. Operated by St. Anthony Hospitals, in partnership with The Children's Hospital of Denver, Penrose-St. Francis Health Services in Colorado Springs and St. Mary Corwin Medical Center in Pueblo, Flight For Life Colorado transports patients to the most appropriate medical facility, based on the condition of the patient, the patient's request and the request of the sending or receiving physicians.