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### *I'll Believe It When Ambulances Fly*



When it comes to medical transportation, the possibilities seem to be endless in the modern world. In today's globalized connectivity, the emergency medical transportation industry has been soaring to new heights, quite literally. The MedCenter Air Fixed Wing Program air ambulance program, owned by Atrium Health, has grown exponentially throughout the years, and the demands for this service becomes more vital every day in today's EMS world. The Mobile Medicine division of Atrium Health owns all of its assets, to include four helicopters, two Citation V jets and two King Air B200 Prop aircrafts, as well as ground ambulances.

How can an ambulance take flight? One may scoff at this technological phenomenon, and say "I'll believe it when pigs fly!" Well, Jennie van Dongen, Team Leader for Fixed Wing provides helpful insight into the reality of the Fixed Wing Program.

Starting as a flight nurse 10 years ago, van Dongen started transporting patients by air and ground through the healthcare system's comprehensive transport program. This included the whole spectrum of medical transportation services, rotating modes of transport on a day-to-day basis to meet patient needs. The range of travel includes helicopter, jet and ground ambulances. Now, she has taken the reigns as a Team Leader for the Fixed Wing portion of MedCenter Air also including for Fixed Wing outreach and revenue cycle management.

Time and location can be of the essence when responding to the Fixed Wing transport needs. Patients utilize this program when traveling or living both nationwide or international. If a medical emergency occurs and proper care is not available in the patient's current location, the Fixed Wing Program can act as a safe-haven for proper care. Patients in need of a higher level of care can access second medical opinions or have the opportunity of being closer to family during time of treatment through these adaptable resources. When a patient requires advanced care in the clouds for long distance transport, the MedCenter Air Fixed Wing Program can accommodate by providing critical care resources and clinical teams to provide all levels of care.

MedCenter Air Fixed Wing has a strategic focus on nationwide and international patient populations, and the aircraft travel with geographic focus on Canada, Bermuda, Caribbean, Mexico and South America.

Another specialty the Fixed Wing service provides is time-sensitive response for organ transplant recipients and for organs being moved to the recipient locations. Van Dongen says, "It's extremely rewarding and gratifying to see our program, medical crew, pilots and maintenance team working together to save lives and impacting individuals for a better quality of life. It's a huge component of the Fixed Wing Program."

The overall division, called Mobile Medicine, also includes Carolina's MED-1 mobile hospital unit that can be comparable to the size of an 18-wheeler. MED-1 is a fully-functioning mobile hospital that includes two OR suits and eight bed treatment center rooms. It can travel nationwide for disaster relief such as helping victims evacuate in the wake of a disaster. There is also a Community Paramedicine program that ensures patients have follow-up care post discharge to reduce morbidity, mortality and re-admittance to the ER/hospital.

Additional components of the Fixed Wing program include contracting with other hospitals across the United States in order to provide services for hospitals that do not have the resources for long distance transports. Also, more stable patients can be transported by commercial airlines and this is a more cost-effective means of transport when air ambulance is not necessary. With the Fixed Wing Medical Assistance Program, medical staff are provided to stabilized patients and can transfer them anywhere in the world to receive the most appropriate care.

The possibilities seem to be endless with the MedCenter Air Fixed Wing Program. Including its division, having everything from mobile hospitals, to taking flights, to specialized services that offer all levels of care to meet patient's clinical needs. People may say, "I'll believe it when pigs fly!" Well, this outdated saying is in the dust as ambulance services evolve to new heights. The reality of the Fixed Wing Program is a dream come true for soaring medical technological advancements in the EMS transportation industry.