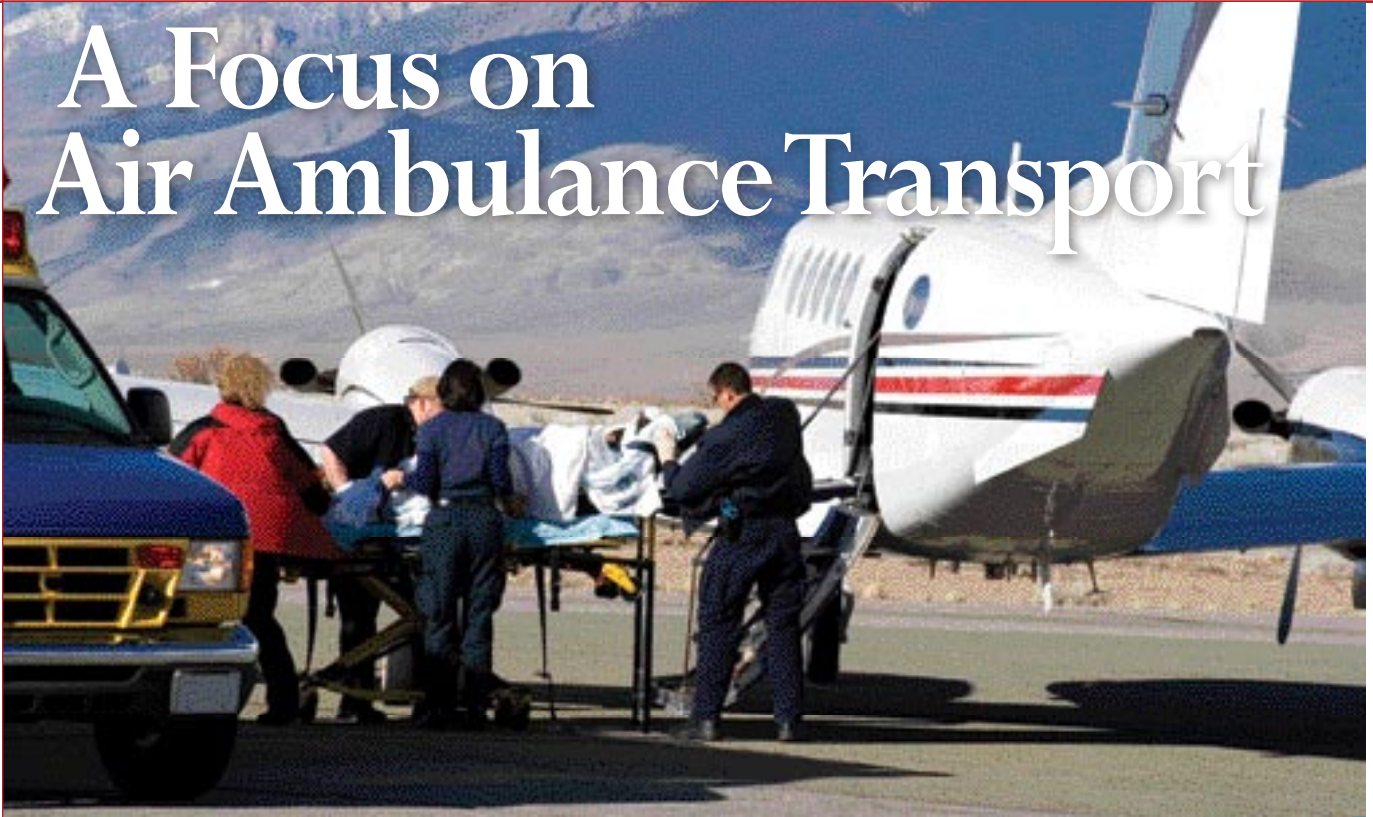


PATIENT PRIMER

A Focus on Air Ambulance Transport



BY ANNE LLEWELLYN, RN-BC, MS, BHSA, CCM, CRRN

If you or a loved one is injured or becomes ill while traveling on business or vacation, the one thing you want most is to be close to your home with your family and friends. If you are medically stable and can travel, you may simply drive home if you are able to drive or move up your flight if you have a flight planned.

But if you are seriously injured or ill, normal means of transportation may not be an option and you may need an air ambulance. Air ambulance transport is the fastest method of transporting critically ill patients from one facility to another, or to bring them closer to loved ones. This is particularly important for international air ambulance transports, when it is necessary to fly a patient long distances with the assistance of qualified medical staff.

Your condition will determine the type of aircraft and medical professionals who will accompany you on the plane. Physicians, nurses, paramedics and respiratory therapists who are specifically trained for air transport will be responsible for transporting you. Questions such as what type of plane will be used, what kind of equipment is on the plane and other questions you or your family have can be explained by the air ambulance company to ensure they are able to transport you safely.

A case manager or social worker will assist you with locating an air ambulance company and will investigate payment options. If the treating physician deems that an air ambulance is medically necessary, your insurance coverage may cover the cost. If not, you can pay out of pocket. In addition, the case manager or social worker can work with the air ambulance company to discuss to see if there are options to reduce costs.

Air medical and ground medical transport services should be fully licensed in the state they operate out of as well as being on a 135 Certificate. The company should also have adequate coverage in the following areas: hull insurance, medical malpractice, general liability and workers' compensation.

The accreditation body that accredits air ambulance companies is the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems (www.camts.org). They provide standards and accreditation for air and critical care ground transport.

In addition, you can check out CONCERN Network, which was established by the Air and Surface Transport Nurses Association (www.astna.org) to provide a means of distributing information to the community about incidents involving air ambulance providers. To look at CONCERN Network go to www.concern-network.org.

There are many factors to take into consideration such as the type of plane and other technical issues that will be investigated by the case manager to ensure that the transport is safe. The air ambulance provider will offer bedside-to-bedside service. Bedside-to-bedside service means that the flight crew will not only land with the patient, but that they will also go with that patient to the medical facility. The crew makes sure that you arrive safely and that the medical staff at the facility has all of the information that they need to treat you. CTP