

# What is Aero Medical Evacuation with Special Reference to Shipping Industry?

(By Dr. G. Sairamanan Director, Global Air Rsq 999 )

Aero medical Evacuation is useful for evacuating seriously sick patients from High Seas to the shore hospital for advance treatment. However sometimes medical emergency on board the ship would also include “search and rescue “ operations, which comes under the preview of the duties of the Coast Guard. Since India has started off shore drilling operations from 1976, civilian registered helicopters are also put into use as air ambulance. With this experience, I do medical evacuation from offshore vessels with the permission of coast guard. This cut shorts the time taken as well as gives maximum comfort to the patient. More over an EMS doctor of a well equipped advanced helicopter can also carry out emergency medical procedures on board itself. This in the long run cuts down mortality, severe trauma injury and maiming.

Imagine a scenario like this-

A ship is sailing smoothly in the deep sea. Suddenly some members of the crew rush to the captain’s cabin and inform him that one of the crew has got his fingers cut while operating some machine on the deck. The captain rushes to the deck to see the fitter of the ship seething in pain. His right hand fingers are highly severed. Except for the thumb all the fingers are severed and the cut pieces are lying on the deck in a pool of blood. The fitter is slowly loosing his consciousness due to heavy loss of blood. The ships doctor is summoned who tries to arrest the further loss of blood and try to stabilise the person. The medical centre in the ship is not equipped to tackle an emergency like this. The captain sends an SOS call. Though in our territorial waters, it is the duty of the Coast Guard to do the “Search and Rescue Operations” if SOS is sent to an Air evacuation company, they can press in an **air ambulance** with the help of the Coast Guard and reach the vessel, air lift the patient, along with pieces of the cut fingers (Placed in Ice bags after cleaning and wrapping in sterile plastic bags) to the nearest shore hospital where technology to graft the severed fingers are available. Micro surgery can be done to graft the cut portion of the fingers and the patient will recover in a week’s time with little maiming and can rejoin his duty in a month’s time. This is one of the common accidents broad the ships.

## **Now what is an Air Ambulance?**

- An **Emergency Medical Service**
- A **Mobile Life Support System on Wings**
- An **Ambulance** service that can reach the **remotest of places**
- **Transports** the needy patient to the hospital within the “**Golden Hours**”

In the situation explained above an **Air Ambulance** reaching the ship on time will save the patient with least damage to his fingers, How???

**An Air Ambulance is specially designed for the Aeromedical needs of the patient.**

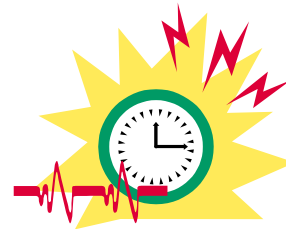
- It contains all life support equipments
- A doctor qualified in Emergency Medicine will be on board the Aircraft
- One or two paramedics will be there to assist the doctor if necessary depending on the casualty
- All necessary life saving drugs will be available.

### **THE INTERIOR OF AN AIR AMBULANCE**



Since the Air Ambulance contains all life saving equipment the patient will be put on the equipment to stabilize and support him. The doctor being trained to handle Emergency will administer the necessary medicines and take him to the appropriate hospital

### **WHY TRANSPORT BY AIR AMBULANCE???**



- **Trauma (Golden Hour)** In case of accident or fire, the patient has to be transported to the major shore hospital and given necessary treatment with the golden hour after giving necessary medication to stop further loss of blood or damage to the internal organs as the case may be.
- **Cardiac (Time is muscle)** For heart attack necessary medication to stop/prevent the damage of heart muscles have to be given with in hours of the attack and further intensive treatment/monitoring has to be given in an appropriate shore hospital.
- **Strokes (Time costs brain cells)** For stroke necessary medication to prevent further damage to the brain cells have to be given and the patient transported to a major shore hospital for further intensive treatment.

- **Surgical intervention** Patients needing emergency surgical intervention like Appendicitis, Kidney stone, etc have to be stabilised and transported to the nearest major shore hospital
- **High Risk OB/Neonatal** In the case of passenger vessels/cruises, if expectant mothers are there, a high risk OB or neonatal emergency can occur. In that case the patient has to be immediately transported to the nearest major shore hospital

**One interesting case I would like to share with you is that of Mr Johnny Lopez.**

On the 17th of October 2006, Mr. Johnny Lopez, aged 49 years, a FIRST ENGINEER aboard vessel m.v.SIBULK INTEGRITY suffered a stroke on high seas. The vessel was en route from Visakapatnam port to Revanada port in Maharashtra. Responding to an S.O.S request by the Master of the vessel Mr. Samodio a swift response was put in effect by the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Chennai and the coast guard vessel RANIJINDAN.

Mr. Johnny Lopez was rescued and evacuated by air ambulance. He was semi-conscious, unable to move and speak and on diagnosis found to have high BP (210/150) and suffering from paralysis on the right side. He was taken to a private hospital in Chennai where he received two weeks of intensive medical care. Mr. Lopez has completely recovered gaining full faculty of his limbs, able to move about normally and speak coherently.

**This incident further highlights the use of emergency medical evacuation by air and getting medical aid within the Golden Hour.**

**Conclusion**

Comprehensive Health Care comprises of Pre- Hospital, Hospital and Post-Hospital care. In the pre-hospital medical management, Emergency Medical Service is the need of the hour. To save lives, one must act within the “Golden Hour” Air Ambulance services are an integral part of any EMS Program.

- Most of the Seafarers are covered by P&I for medical evacuation. This facility should be extended to all Seafarers
- It is very important to deliver the right information at the right time to the right people to get quality health care.

So it is my suggestion that the master of the ship keeps in handy

- ✚ The P&I No of all his crew
- ✚ Names and contact details of the various medical evacuation companies in the ship’s route.
- ✚ While calling for emergency evacuation, have a gist of the patient’s condition as given by the ship’s doctor. This will help the EMS doctor to prepare the medicines, alert the shore hospital etc.

At present the facility for evacuation is available from Tuticorin to Vizag. It will be extended to Paradip and later to whole Eastern and Western coasts of India.

Let us treat patients as patients and not as cargos

**Helicopter Emergency Medical Service** or **HEMS** has saved over one million lives and has transported tens of thousands of patients to emergency care.

Let us also utilise the service of **HEMS** to save our seafarers.

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