HISTORY OF HELICOPTER EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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The day it all began……

- Started operations in 1976
- Sponsored by Lions International
- Based at the then JG Strydom Hospital
- Main focus – IHTs for cardiothoracic unit
Early days.....

- In **1977**, the Transvaal Provincial Administration and Republic Helicopters took over the service.
- Service moved to Johannesburg General Hospital.
- Used a Long Ranger
Early days….

- Crew consisted of nursing staff from the surgical ICU at the Johannesburg General Hospital.
Early days…..

- On the **2 July 1978**, a critically injured rally driver was airlifted from Swaziland to the new helipad at Johannesburg General Hospital.

*Life-saving chopper flight had to stop for the Customs*
Flight for Life
Early days…..

• The Long Ranger was involved in a power line strike in 1986 during a search & rescue mission.
Early days…..

Early days.....

- This helicopter was mainly used for IHTs however it also started to service primary callouts.
Early days…..

- Almost 10 years later……..ALS paramedics were added to the HEMS crew.
Flight for Life

- Towards the end of 1992 a government tender was opened for the provision of a HEMS operation.

- And as a result of this, in 1993 a public-private partnership was formed between the Transvaal Provincial Administration and Europ Assistance.
Flight for Life

- Two Long Rangers were leased through Court Helicopters.
Flight for Life

- One these was based at the Johannesburg General Hospital and the other at HF Verwoerd Hospital in Pretoria.

- Started as a daylight service
Flight for Life

- In **1995**, the service became a 24 hour operation from the JHB base making use of a BO105 helicopter.
Flight for Life

• This was the first fully fledged 24 hour service in SA and it responded to IHTs and primaries.
Flight for Life

- One of the Long Rangers was moved to Virginia Airport in KwaZulu Natal.

- In 1998, the service was downgraded to a daylight only service as the Provincial Government withdrew any form of financial contribution.
Flight for Life
Flight for Life

• In 1999, a private charter company (Star Air Ambulance Services) took over the management of the service.
• They provided a 24 hour service without any government subsidy.
• Without the government funding, the service underwent an extensive overhaul to become a Section 21 Non-Profit Organization known as STAR.
Operating alongside Flight for Life..

• In **1990**, a company called Medical Rescue International (MRI) leased their first helicopter.
MRI

• The helicopter was placed alongside the Flight for Life helicopter at the Johannesburg General Hospital.
MRI

- In **1991**, the helicopter was moved to a helipad at the Garden City Clinic and at times it was also based at the Wonderboom Airport in Pretoria.
- By **1995**, MRI had 4 HEMS operations in total with the assistance of National Airways Corporation.
- They were based in Johannesburg, Harrismith, Durban and Cape Town.
MRI

- A number of flying hours each month were sponsored by MRI to fly indigent patients.
MRI

- The administration & billing was done by MRI and the collecting of funds were not efficient.
- Medical aids questioned the need for a helicopter transfer and often repudiated claims.
- All 4 helicopters were taken out of service in 2000.
STAR

- STAR took over from Flight for Life in October 1999.

- They continued to work closely with Flight for Life along with other partnerships including the Provincial Government to get the operation in JHB up and running as a 24 hour operation again.
STAR

- The vision of STAR was to provide a HEMS operation to **ALL** South African citizens.

- Your Life – Our Priority

- STAR relied on sponsorships and donations.
STAR

- In **2004**, STAR achieved Section 18A status which assisted with fundraising capabilities allowing STAR to receive donations and apply for lottery funding.
STAR

- In **2005**, STAR was recognized by EURAMI as a world class service.
STAR

- STAR opened bases across the country
STAR

• Gauteng base:
  ▫ First made use of a BO105 which was later changed to an EC135
  ▫ Based at Johannesburg General Hospital
  ▫ 24 hour operation (only one in SA at that time)
STAR
STAR

- **Tshwane base:**
  - Long Ranger helicopter
  - Based at Unitas Hospital
  - Daylight operation
  - Later made use of a Squirrel helicopter
STAR
STAR

- **Polokwane base:**
  - BO105 helicopter
  - Based at the fire station at the Polokwane Civil Air Field
  - Daylight operation
STAR
STAR

- **KwaZulu Natal base:**
  - EC120 helicopter
  - Based at Virginia Airport
  - Daylight operation
  - EC120 was damaged during a training incident and written off
  - Replaced with Long Ranger from Tshwane
STAR
STAR

- Cape Town operation:
  - BO105 helicopter
  - Based at Base 4, Cape Town International Airport
  - Daylight operation
  - Partnered with RCAMS for a while
STAR
STAR

• STAR received zero state subsidy as they were only reimbursed for missions undertaken on the state’s behalf.

• Relied on corporate sponsors.
STAR

• The first of one of these sponsors was Liberty Life.
STAR

- Another one of the corporate sponsors was Cell C
STAR

• STAR utilized set dispatch guidelines, however, these guidelines were often used by the funder to decline payment.
STAR

• The crew consisted of a pilot, doctor and ALS paramedic.
• At that time, STAR was one out of eighteen services worldwide to crew with both a doctor and paramedic.
STAR

- HEMS crew were mostly volunteers
- Had to comply with strict entry criteria to fly and there was a long waiting list
- Received an honorarium to cover basic on-duty expenses
STAR
STAR

- STAR was seen as a neutral and independent service allowing access to both private and public EMS crews.
STAR

- >76% of patients flown were indigent
- Serviced between 150-200 missions/month
- Received proudly South African status in 2004
- QA committee met weekly to review flights
- All crew attended M&Ms twice a month
STAR

- Specialised Trauma Air Response changed to Specialised Trauma Air Rescue later on.
STAR

- STAR ceased operations in 2006 due to lack of funding after many attempts to restructure the business model.
Helivac

- Originated in **2008** as a subscription based helicopter emergency membership
- Main focus was to eliminate medical insurance authorisation
- “*Time saves lives, Helivac saves both*”
Helivac

- In **2009**, Helivac aeromedical service was launched.
- Operated a Squirrel from Grand Central Airport in Midrand.
Helivac

- Funded by monthly subscription fees.
- Aim was to minimise helicopter activation times by negating the pre-authorisation process.
Helivac

- Helivac aeromedical services ceased operations in 2010 due to the expenses associated with having a dedicated helicopter.
- Reverted back to the original operation making use of service providers.
Currently ……..

- In South Africa currently, there are 3 HEMS operators:
  1) Red Cross Air Mercy Services
  2) ER24
  3) Netcare 911
RCAMS

- Launched their first HEMS operation in the Western Cape in 2000 using a BO105
- Based at Base 4 at Cape Town International Airport
- Non-profit organisation
RCAMS

- Daylight operations
- Crewed with a pilot and two medical crew which may be made up of a doctor, ALS or ILS paramedic
RCAMS

- In 2005, a RCAMS BO105 was involved in a fatal accident whilst en-route to a clinic in George. All crew and patient were killed.
- First fatal HEMS incident in South Africa.
RCAMS

• Currently have bases in the following areas:
  ▫ Western Cape
  ▫ Oudtshoorn
  ▫ Durban
  ▫ Richards Bay
  ▫ Nelspruit
  ▫ Polokwane
  ▫ Bloemfontein
ER24

- Operate two dedicated HEMS machines
- Commenced operations in 2010 with the first helicopter based at Lanseria Airport in Johannesburg
ER24

- The second helicopter is based at Base 4 at Cape Town International Airport
ER24

- Operate in daylight hours
- Crewed by two ALS paramedics and a pilot
Netcare 911

- Commenced operations in **2005**
- Took over the 24 hour HEMS operation in Gauteng after the closure of STAR
- Based at the Johannesburg General Hospital
Netcare 911

• Helicopter was crewed with one pilot during the day and two pilots during night operations
• Medical crew consisted of a doctor and ALS paramedic
Netcare 911

- Moved to Grand Central Airport in 2006.
- Used the EC 135 for night operations and a Squirrel for daylight operations
- Later changed to a BO105
Netcare 911

- Second base was opened at Virginia Airport in KwaZulu Natal in 2006
- Daylight only
- Used a Squirrel but now uses a BO105
Netcare 911

- In **2008**, a base was opened in the Eastern Cape
- Only operated during daylight hours
- Closed in **2010**
Netcare 911

- In **2011**, Netcare 4 was launched and operates out of JHB
- Service level agreement between Netcare 911 and Anglo American
With thanks to........

- Lynn Botha
- Liz Ferguson
- Patrick Wallett
- Warren Hastings
- JP Van Tonder
- Gary Berkowitz
- Sean Groome
- Eleanor Geldard
- Paul Germishuizen
- Tom Watson

- Rhett Davies
- Nick Botoulas
- Shaughun Jackson
- Peter Brink
- Bruna Dessena
- Ian Fourie
- Derek Jones
- David Dennison
- Richard Mulder
- Anchen Laubscher