

AIR AMBULANCE



TERRIE HENDERSON Tribune-Herald

Paramedic Michael Matsui, a rapid response team member with AirMed Hawaii, is on call from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day to assist with air ambulance transports. Matsui, who retired from the Hawaii County Fire Department, said he helps patients from their hospital beds until they reach the aircraft at Hilo Medical Center

Taking care to the air

In an undated photo, a team of medical professionals assists a patient on an AirMed Hawaii flight.

In Hilo, one or two patients are transported each day to another island for medical care, said paramedic Michael Matsui.

MICHAEL MATSUI



Rapid responders assist patients from hospital to airport

By TERRIE HENDERSON *Tribune-Herald staff writer*

Paramedic Michael Matsui said being transported from Hilo to another island for medical care can be stressful for some patients. Already the patient is probably not feeling well and needs specialized medical care, he

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said.

This is where Matsui, a Hilo resident who is also a retired paramedic from the Hawaii County Fire Department, comes in.

As a rapid response team member with AirMed Hawaii, Matsui is on call from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day of the week, ready to spring into action and assist with medical air transports.

When a medical air transport is happening and AirMed Hawaii is the company doing the transfer, Matsui is alerted by telephone from AirMed Hawaii's Honolulu location. He then has 20 minutes to get to the bedside of the person who must be transported.

Matsui helps with paperwork needed to transfer the patient and helps prepare the patient for flight. He also speaks with patients and tries to answer any questions they have to help put their minds at ease before the flight.

"This team really helps with moving a patient quickly and comfortably," said Garfield Arakaki, another AirMed Hawaii rapid response team member in Hilo. "I can assume care of a patient if necessary to free up the hospital's nurses and get someone more critical a bed. The team takes the strain off the hospital staff by taking care of the patient who is about to leave, while also expediting the transfer process."

No other air ambulance company in the state offers a rapid response team, Arakaki said.

"We are working collaboratively with American Medical Response to reduce delays in the ground transportation portion of transfers," said Sandy Apter, AirMed Hawaii president. "With AirMed's Rapid Response program, the ground ambulance will be able to respond to calls with staffed ambulances that are immediately available."

Matsui said there are transports from Hilo usually once or twice a day.

"I think the most I've been called is three times in one day," Matsui said. "You kind of get used to having to go on the spur of the moment. I enjoy doing it."

Matsui said it generally takes about an hour from the time he gets the call to the time the plane with the patient leaves Hilo International Airport. They have to wait for the plane to reach Hilo from Honolulu, he said.

AirMed Hawaii has three planes they use for inter island flights, he said. The company's three King Air C-90 aircrafts are stationed on Oahu. They also can transport patients to the mainland if necessary, Matsui said.

The planes are equipped with state-of-the-art medical transport equipment, including an intra-aortic balloon pump and fetal heart monitor.

Matsui does not board the plane, but he accompanies the patient from the hospital bed to the airplane.

On the plane there is a pilot and co-pilot, a paramedic and one or two nurses, he said. Patients can usually have one family member also accompany them, he added.

Matsui said many of the people who are transported by air are trauma, cardiac, stroke, neonatal and pediatric patients. He said there are various other medical reasons a person may be transported.

"The island hospitals do a fantastic job with what resources they have," Matsui said.

"Transferring a patient to Oahu, Maui or the mainland allows the patient to receive care and treatment currently not available here."

Occasionally, a team of doctors will come to Hilo to receive a patient in extreme cases or when a patient is not able to be stabilized, Matsui said.

Officials at Hilo Medical Center say air ambulance services are an important part of providing medical care to East Hawaii.

Odetta Rapozo-Pung, Hilo Medical Center Emergency Department nurse manager, said, "AirMed and Hawaii Air Ambulance are flight ambulance services which provide medical transportation between the Hawaiian Islands, the mainland, and throughout the world on a 24/7 basis."

Rapozo-Pung said from Sept. 20, 2007 through last Thursday, there were 256 patients transferred by air from Hilo Medical Center to various other medical centers. She said there is an average of 42 patients per month transferred from the emergency department using both AirMed Hawaii and Hawaii Air Ambulance. She said in one year, about 500 patients will be transported from the emergency department to another location for medical care.

Chris Takahashi, Hilo Medical Center surgical services supervisor, said the Coast Guard can also transport patients.

"Utilization of each company is based on who can provide the fastest service," Takahashi said.

Without AirMed Hawaii, Hilo would be at a disadvantage, Takahashi said.

"Our patients would not receive the necessary care that is needed," Takahashi said. "We're happy that there are more carriers to provide this necessary service for our patients who don't have the luxury of another hospital close by."

Rapozo-Pung said, "currently, the hospital is satisfied with both air flight services. The staff of Hawaii Air Ambulance and AirMed Hawaii work closely with the staff at Hilo Medical Center. Both companies provide bedside service and offer the best care they can offer to the outer islands."

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