Essex & Herts Air Ambulance to carry blood on board

Friday 15 March, 2019

13th March 2019

Essex & Herts Air Ambulance to carry blood supplies

From March 20th 2019, Essex & Herts Air Ambulance (EHAAT) will carry blood supplies on board its helicopters and Rapid Response Vehicles (RRVs). This major development will provide a significant improvement in the care that can be provided to patients.

Being able to give a pre-hospital transfusion at the scene of an incident could be a life-saving intervention for patients suffering significant bleeding and blood loss. This early transfusion will significantly reduce the time lost in having to take a patient to a hospital to receive blood. Patients who have suffered blood loss are currently given a saline solution, which doesn't carry oxygen or help with clotting of injuries.

The EHAAT helicopters and RRVs will carry packed red blood cells of blood group O Negative, meaning they can be used on any patient. When required, these will be given with plasma, the other major component of human blood. Together these can form an effective replacement for patients who have lost blood.

The packed red blood cells will be supplied daily from The Princess Alexandra Hospital in Harlow and be delivered to EHAAT's Airbases at Earls Colne and North Weald by riders from Essex Voluntary Blood Service (EVBS). The blood will be replaced daily and replenished as required.

The blood will be delivered and stored in special cool boxes that keep the blood at a cool temperature for at least 24 hours. These are fitted with a data logger that indicates if the temperature has risen beyond safe limits. If unused after 24 hours the blood will be returned to blood donation system for use elsewhere, preventing any wastage of this precious commodity.

When the blood is required, it will be warmed to at least body temperature using a MEQU warmer, which costs approximately £3,000, to make it safe to administer to the patient and prevent unnecessary cooling of the patient.

EHAAT Clinical Director Stuart Elms said: "This exciting new venture for EHAAT has been many months in preparation and will make a significant difference to the most critically injured patients in our region.

"We have been working closely with our partners at The Princess Alexandra Hospital and our colleagues from the EVBS to ensure a safe, continuous temperature-controlled supply of these vital products with a wish for zero waste.

"Traditionally patients have had blood lost replaced with saline which has many limitations when what they need is the oxygen-carrying capability and clotting factors of blood products.

"Based on our current caseload we anticipate that we will need to provide blood products around once a week.

"Thank you to Nore Light Masonic Lodge no 35, for their kind donation which has paid for the MEQU blood warmer and four of the special cool bags we needed to purchase in order to carry blood supplies."

Tracy Nevin, Blood Transfusion Specialist Practitioner at The Princess Alexandra Hospital said: "We are so delighted and excited to be working in partnership with EHAAT in providing emergency blood at the roadside. We have developed such a positive working relationship in such a short time that we're elated to be going live."

Carol Weller, Chairlady and Coordinator for EVBS said: "We are honoured to join forces with EHAAT. This opportunity has taken time to put together, but the effort is worth the lives that we can potentially help save. The team is as excited as I am and we cannot wait to go live."

Geraldine Symons, Immediate Past Master of Nore Light Masonic Lodge no 35, which donated money to pay for a blood warmer and four cool bags said: "We are delighted to contribute. Essex and Herts Air Ambulance do heroic work in saving lives and we are in awe of them. Long may they continue and we hope we have been able to help in some small way."

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Photograph: L to R: Laurie Phillipson (Clinical Manager, EHAAT) Tracy Nevin (The Princess Alexandra Hospital) and Carol Weller (EVBS)

For more information please contact Gavin Sherriff, PR Officer, on 0345 2417 690 or 07870 158 309

Notes to Editor:

Essex & Herts Air Ambulance (EHAAT) is a Charity that provides a Helicopter Emergency Medical Services (HEMS) for the critically ill and injured of Essex, Hertfordshire and the surrounding areas.

The service is provided free of charge but, unlike NHS emergency services, the Charity receives no direct funding from the Government or National Lottery. It costs £750,000 every month to keep the service operational and saving lives, and this would not be possible without the generosity and goodwill of people and businesses of Essex, Hertfordshire and beyond.

Each of the Charity's HEMS teams consist of two Pilots, a Pre-hospital Care Doctor and a Critical Care Paramedic.

These teams, made up of highly-skilled individuals, tended to 1,491 patients in 2018 and are the backbone of your local life-saving Charity.

The fleet, consisting of two Air Ambulances, and four Rapid Response Vehicles (RRVs - cars) operates seven days a week from 7am to 9pm. After sunset, the Critical Care Team continues to provide the service using Rapid Response Vehicles.

In addition, a Rapid Response Vehicle is operational on a Friday and Saturday evening from 6pm until 2am with a Pre-hospital Care Doctor and Critical Care Paramedic.

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