New kit bags help with patient care in air ambulance's joint busiest week

Thursday 15 June, 2023

While many people have been enjoying the pleasant weather, the crew from Great Western Air Ambulance Charity (GWAAC) has been incredibly busy. They experienced their joint busiest week on record with 52 call-outs, at the end of May 2023.

The crew responded to around half of these in the helicopter and half in a critical care car; both vehicles fully stocked with specialist kit packed into GWAAC's new bespoke kit bags, which were funded by the County Air Ambulance HELP Appeal — the only charity in the country dedicated to funding NHS hospital helipads.

Advanced Clinical Practitioner in Critical Care, Vicki Brown, helped spearhead the new kit bags project. Vicki said, *"The new bags are speeding up processes, especially setting up kit for pre-hospital emergency anaesthesia (PHEA); they are helping to improve the care we provide to people in our communities in urgent need of our help."*

The project took two years to complete and included developing the kit bag system (GWAAC's third generation of kit bags), finding funding, and getting the bags into mainstream use by the entire crew.

The second-generation kit bags had been in service since 2014 and had evolved rather than been designed for the crew's needs and they were becoming inefficient. With speed of care and patient safety at the forefront of everybody's minds, it was decided that they needed replacing.

The new bespoke kit bag system contains a series of pouches with everything required for a task in one place. This modular approach makes it easy to use and saves time both on scene and during replenishment, ultimately improving the way GWAAC cares for its patients.

Thank you to the HELP Appeal

GWAAC is hugely grateful to the County Air Ambulance HELP Appeal — which previously funded GWAAC's blood-warming machines enabling the crew to perform blood transfusions at the scene of an incident — for providing the majority of the funding (£20,000 out of £25,000 that was needed for the manufacture of the new bags).

The crew needed five sets of bags, one for each of the three critical care cars, one for the helicopter, and one for training purposes. This equates to 38 different bags in total and over 160 pouches. To ensure the bags met the needs of the crew and would last for years to come, they had to be tailor-made as well as being resilient, waterproof, high viz and adaptable.

"We are pleased to have been able to fund these new kit bags for the Great Western Air Ambulance Charity crew. The HELP Appeal is focused on saving lives, and the innovative design of these new bags will help GWAAC's crew deliver the best care to critically ill patients."

Robert Bertram, Chief Executive, HELP Appeal

It's a combination of bespoke kit bags, specialist equipment and knowing how to use it, that saves lives

GWAAC's patients need hospital-level care at the scene of an incident. But until the call comes in, the specialist crew doesn't know what that treatment will be or where they will need to do it. One thing they do know is they need to be prepared for anything.

The new kit bags help them do this, as do the hours of training they put in every day practicing the vast range of lifesaving skills and procedures they might need to perform. ?

Over the bank holiday period (27, 28 and 29 May) GWAAC's crew rushed to help 27 people in need of emergency pre-hospital care, equating to an average of nine people a day over the three-day period. The daily average for the charity is around five people a day. Sunday was GWAAC's joint busiest day on record with 13 call-outs.

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Notes for editors

1. GWAAC provides the critical care and air ambulance service for 2.1 million people across Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, North Somerset, and parts of Wiltshire.
2. The GWAAC Critical Care Team consists of highly trained and experienced Critical Care Doctors, Advanced Practitioners and Specialist Paramedics in Critical Care, who bring the skill and expertise of a hospital emergency department to the patient.
3. In 2022 GWAAC was called to help 1,808 people in urgent need. The Critical Care Team is needed by an average of five patients a day, and rushes to treat them by helicopter or critical care car. On average each mission costs around £2,000 to attend.
4. The charity needs to raise over £4 million a year in order to remain operational yet receives no day-to-day funding from the Government or National Lottery.

About the HELP Appeal

County Air Ambulance Trust is a registered Charity in England and Wales (1057063) and in Scotland (SCO45963).

Its HELP Appeal campaign aims to significantly increase the number of onsite hospital helipads at major trauma centres and A&E hospitals through its grant scheme which offers non-repayable grants to hospitals to help fund new helipads or upgrade existing helipads.

It has funded lifesaving helipads at Bristol Royal Infirmary, Southmead Hospital Bristol and Gloucestershire Royal Hospital.

It has funded 45 hospital helipads in total which have seen over 24,000 landings.

The HELP Appeal relies solely on charitable donations and does not receive any government funding or money from the National Lottery.

1. You can follow the HELP Appeal on Twitter or Instagram: @helipadHELP or on Facebook or Linkedin. You can also visit www.helpappeal.org.uk for further information.

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