Pilot and Bikers Race Against Clock in Life Saving Dash to the North

Tuesday 23 November, 2021

Civil Air Support (CAS) and SERV Wessex (a member organisation of the National Association of Blood Bikes) have united once again to deliver time-critical blood stem cells from a healthy donor in Salisbury District Hospital to a waiting patient in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

With the NHS and Emergency Services under considerable pressure through the Covid 19 pandemic, resources available for the rapid transportation of sensitive materials across the UK are stretched. That's where CAS can help, especially when linking up with Blood Bikes to coordinate a rapid relay of stem cells from door-to-door.

SERV Wessex wasted no time in collecting the stem cells from Salisbury Hospital and as the rider made his way Northwest towards Thruxton Airfield, a twin-engine Cessna 414 of the Civil Air Support fleet was racing to meet him at 200 mph from its Turweston base.

Once the handover was completed, the Cessna piloted by CAS Operations Manager Graham Mountford began its journey towards Newcastle. After take-off at 10:28am, Graham climbed steadily to his cruising altitude of 8000 feet before descending into Newcastle International Airport and landing smoothly on Runway 07 just 1 hour and 47 minutes later.

As Graham spooled down the Cessna's 310 hp Continental engines, a fast rider from Northumbria Blood Bikes was already waiting. The stem cell package was whisked through Newcastle Airport and arrived at the Royal Victoria Infirmary within 14 minutes.

Through meticulous planning, professionalism, and the dedication of volunteers from Blood Bike groups and CAS, the stem cells were delivered in a useable condition without cost to the public purse and without delay or risk to the patient.

A spokesperson for Serv Wessex said: "*CAS are the blood Bikers of the air. It is a tremendous commitment to support the Blood Bikers on the road. Together something that might take 6/7 hours to get across the country can be done in half the time. Not only is this good for the receiving patient but means our riders are not in the saddle for hours*."

It's worth noting that the operation could not have succeeded without the outstanding support and cooperation from Gordon Harvey and the Thruxton Aerodrome team. From figuring out how to park an aircraft larger than their parking bays to waiving all fees, they proved to be a key enablement partner for this CAS mission, and not for the first time.

During a busy week for the partnership between Blood Bikes and CAS, the previous day another urgent FMT (Faecal Microbiome Transplant) package had been relayed from the University of Birmingham Microbiome Treatment Centre to a Bournemouth hospital where a patient suffering with *C. difficile colitis was awaiting treatment.*

It's testimony to the dedication of the volunteers from Blood Bikes and CAS that they are prepared to give so much of their time, equipment and pay for fuel and meet numerous other costs to help people whom they will never know and never meet, nor will they come to understand whether their contributions lead to an ultimately successful outcome. They assist merely because they are willing and able, and because the collaboration between these two great voluntary organisations has so much to offer our society in the post-pandemic era.

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