When you absolutely need a fast motorbike and a much faster aircraft, and nothing else will do…

Thursday 23 May, 2024

In circumstances where locally available antibiotics fail to provide relief for sufferers of a persistent infection, the next step is to offer a treatment using donor materials.

One such situation occurred recently where a patient on the Isle of Wight required this treatment, only available from the University of Birmingham Microbiome Treatment Centre.

The ‘not so good’ news was that once prepared, the material has an extremely short shelf life. With the time it takes to transport via road and then ferry to get from Birmingham to the Isle of Wight, you have a problem!

Fortunately, when confronted with this kind of challenge there’s an effective solution provider from which the NHS can request assistance. Civil Air Support (CAS) working alongside regional based Blood Bike groups offers the logistical capability, human resources, and equipment to provide the necessary response. Also, as they’re charities funded by donation and operated entirely by volunteers, these organisations offer their services for free.

When alerted to the urgent need, CAS Operations Manager Tim Bennett was able to coordinate the collection of the sample from the MTC and delivery to Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green Airport by Shropshire Blood Bikes.

The next challenge was to mobilise a capable crew and a suitable aircraft from the CAS fleet. Given the uncertain weather conditions expected on route and considering the time-limited nature of the material, the CAS operations team determined that a fast aircraft capable of flight in IMC (Instrument Meteorological Conditions) would be required.

CAS Pilot Rob Devey based at Lee on Solent responded to the call for a volunteer. His TBM 960 was the ideal aircraft, both fast (capable of cruising at speeds up to 330 knots) and rated to fly in any weather conditions.

With Tim Bennett on board as observer, the aircraft was repositioned to Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green on Friday morning after a 37-minute flight from Lee on Solent. The critical sample was handed over by Blood Bikes rider Bill Rooney and the emergency flight departed immediately for Bembridge airport on the Isle of Wight.

Cruising at 6,000 feet, the flight was aided by a traffic information service and a smooth handover between Air Traffic Controllers at Brize Norton and Farnborough. Rob eased the big turboprop smoothly onto runway 30 at Bembridge some 34 minutes after departure, where a medical team from the Isle of Wight NHS Trust were waiting.

A representative of the Isle of Wight NHS Trust expressed thanks and recognised the unique value of the contribution made by the team. “*Without the help of Rob’s crew, CAS and Blood Bikes, we'd simply have no way of getting the material to the patient before it has expired and would be unable to offer this much needed treatment for a very difficult to treat condition. We are extremely grateful for their help in organising and carrying out the transport.”*

CAS would also like to extend sincere thanks to Tony Hall at Wolverhampton Halfpenny Green airport and the owners of Bembridge and Lee on Solent airports for waiving all landing and handling charges for the mission flight.

Media:









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