

Medical escort training – a rare opportunity

MISSION UK



Kerryn Reynolds, nurse manager for international operations at International SOS, UK, reports on a medical transportation study day held for Virgin Atlantic staff

Working in the medical assistance industry allows doctors and nurses the opportunity to not only be involved with the complex logistical and medical arrangements required for evacuations and repatriations, but it also provides the opportunity to serve as an in-flight medical escort. This rewarding speciality provides exposure to healthcare from an international perspective and is becoming a highly sought-after career choice in its own right. However, specific training opportunities are scarce, and in-flight medical escorts often have to rely on personal experience to develop their skills.

International SOS operates in over 70 countries and its services range from consultancy and planning services to 24-hour medical and security advice and assistance. It also provides emergency medical and security evacuations when there is a critical illness, accident or civil unrest. Last year, the company handled over one million assistance cases, including more than 18,000 evacuations. With this in mind, the company is passionate about developing the fields of medical assistance, aviation and transport medicine. Its medical teams are supported by a curriculum of continuous professional development to develop the skills required to work in the in-flight setting. These include theoretical as well as practical education programmes to simulate the aircraft cabin environment.

Partnering up

As part of this ongoing training, International SOS has recently developed and held a joint venture with Virgin Atlantic Airways to create a bespoke



'medical transport on a commercial aircraft' training day. Designed as a practical hands-on teaching module, the course focused on the medical skills required to manage patients in flight on a commercial jet. Sessions included stretcher management onboard commercial aircraft, familiarisation with communicating with ground-based emergency care doctors at MedAire's MedLink Global Response Center and using the Tempus telemedicine device to transmit vital signs from the aircraft to MedLink. Training also included common onboard medical scenarios and aircraft emergencies. The unrivalled team favourite for the day was exiting the plane from the evacuation chute at the height of the cabin door of a Boeing 747 — certainly not for the faint-hearted!

Several lectures and presentations covered a range of the medical and logistical aspects of commercial aviation – from medical clearance and equipment safety to advances in aviation medicine. Although the course is geared for doctors and nurses, attendance was open to anyone interested, from a variety of departments. It was a terrific team-building experience that will facilitate inter-department co-ordination, as each attendee gained a greater insight into the

Above: Stretcher handling inside an aircraft
Left: Some of the International SOS team looking forward to their emergency descent exercise

importance of each other's roles. The Virgin medical training team is a dedicated department, providing quality in-house medical training for all their flight and cabin crew, as well

as focusing on passenger safety. The team has also been instrumental in developing the high standards of medical training and equipment that is available on their fleet. The training base at Gatwick Airport is a purpose-built, well-equipped and realistic setting to teach the essentials of in-flight medicine. Overall, it was a fantastic day enjoyed by the whole team. ▲



Kerryn Reynolds joined International SOS in 2005 and currently holds the role of nursing manager for Northern Europe with full oversight of nursing staff and medical escorts in the region. Working

with a team of doctors and nurses, Reynolds provides oversight of the medical assistance platform and the co-ordination of cross-border medical evacuations. Additionally, she manages the medical transportation escort training programme for the UK and Russia. She is an Australian-trained registered nurse with a background in emergency medicine and flight nursing. She has a special interest in tropical and travel medicine and holds a diploma of tropical nursing.