

From the University of Mississippi Medical Center Division of Public Affairs

UMMC PLANS TO EXPAND AIRCARE SERVICE, REACH PATIENTS SOONER, WITH NEW HELICOPTER IN GRENADA

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JACKSON, Miss. – Addition of a third AirCare helicopter, which would be based at UMMC Grenada this spring, promises to save lives by quickly transporting patients to hospitals while providing advanced-life-support services en route.

AirCare, the University of Mississippi Medical Center's emergency flight service, bases its current helicopters at the main UMMC campus in Jackson and at Key Field in Meridian.

"This expansion would improve emergency care in Mississippi, reduce response times, and help patients survive traumatic events," said Dr. James E. Keeton, UMMC vice chancellor for health affairs.

"The timing and market are right for this expansion and certainly the need is present. We've been looking at this addition since bringing Grenada's medical center into the UMMC family."

UMMC signed an agreement with the Grenada facility in August and a long-term lease will go into effect this month.

AirCare, which completed its first flight in February 1996, transports patients from accident sites to medical facilities and between hospitals. Administrators added the Meridian-based helicopter in 2009 and a dedicated hangar and other permanent facilities there late last year.

The latest expansion would require approval from the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning Board of Trustees. The Medical Center would lease the third helicopter and source pilots and mechanics from its current partner, Lafayette, La.-based PHI Air Medical.

With all agreements and approvals in place, the new helicopter and four flight crews of a nurse, paramedic and pilot each, could be operational by April, said Jonathan Wilson, UMMC director of emergency services.

"Our flight radius with this new aircraft, as with our current ones, would allow us to meet our mission of serving the entire state," Wilson said.

"This aircraft would primarily serve north Mississippi and help cut down the amount of time it takes to get patients to definitive care. We'll build on our relationships with the other hospital-based flight services, like North Mississippi Medical Center's CareFlight and the Hospital Wing in Memphis. By working together, we can provide the best patient care possible in support of local emergency-responders and hospital providers."

AirCare's helicopters are coordinated through Mississippi MED-COM, the statewide emergency medical communications and coordination hub at UMMC.

Wilson said in addition to improving emergency medical care in Mississippi, the expansion would positively impact the state's economy.

"We would add over 15 jobs, leasing an aircraft and providing a valuable service to our state's communities for years to come," he said.

AirCare Program Director Donna Norris said the service transports more than 1,000 patients per year using the two helicopters. She estimates the third would add 300 transports annually.

"These are essentially flying intensive care units capable of treating all ages, from newborn through adulthood," Norris said. "For example, we can administer blood or specialty medications to treat clogged vessels causing heart attacks and strokes to our patients. We utilize an isolette to transport premature infants. And our pilots can fly in some marginal weather conditions using instruments-only. All those capabilities are important because they increase each patient's chances for survival."

Tom Fortner 1/13/14 10:25 AM

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Norris said the new helicopter would be an American Eurocopter 135, the same model based in Meridian.

"With safety as our top priority, AirCare is dedicated to providing top-level emergency care and transport," Norris said. "By cutting down response times, this new helicopter will save Mississippians' lives."

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The University of Mississippi Medical Center, located in Jackson, is the state's only academic medical center. UMMC encompasses five health science schools, including medicine, nursing, health related professions, dentistry and graduate studies, as well as the site where University of Mississippi pharmacy students do their clinical training. The Medical Center's health-care enterprise includes five hospitals and University Physicians, the faculty group practice. The Medical Center's threefold mission is to educate tomorrow's health-care professionals, conduct innovative research to improve human health, and to provide the highest quality care available to the state's population. A major goal of the Medical Center is the improvement of the health of Mississippians and the elimination of health disparities. For more information, contact the Division of Public Affairs at (601) 984-1100 or umc.edu/publicaffairs