

## **Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance with John Parker**

We were delighted to welcome John and his colleague Richard Bedford along to talk about the crucial service provided by that distinctive yellow helicopter sometimes seen landing on Cove Green. His entertaining and informative talk covered the history of the service, its organisation, the helicopter, its crew and its operation.

The first air ambulance service was established in Cornwall in 1987 and there are now 32 throughout England and Wales, each a separate charity, operating 19 individual air ambulances. (The Scottish air ambulance service is funded by the NHS). The charity that runs HIOWAA was set up in 2005 and became operational on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007.

Based in Southampton, HIOWAA has 18 full- and part-time staff and more than 150 volunteers. The helicopter is based at Thruxton and is leased from Bond, who provide pilots and maintenance. It is an H135, which is clear to fly at night, has the call-sign Helemed 56, and can reach any destination in Hampshire in 15 minutes: in the Isle of Wight in 20 minutes. The helicopter can land on an area the size of a tennis court and its skids mean it can land on almost any terrain, though for beach landings the pilot must remain at the controls with the rotors running to ensure that the craft isn't stranded by incoming tide.

This new helicopter has side opening, which is safer for patient and crew, a shrouded tail rotor and is cleared to instrument-fly. It has two turbo engines and a top cruising speed of 157 mph. It can fly for three hours and 40 minutes before refuelling but never flies with full tanks. Other equipment includes two Garmin GPS systems, a moving map display, two I-pad minis, a power line detector, Fenn night vision goggles and a Trakka high intensity searchlight.

The service currently operates from 7.00am till 2.00am, seven days a week, and works closely with neighbouring air ambulance services to provide additional support for major incidents and to ensure coverage while crews are deployed. The critical care team also operates from a road response vehicle, which provides cover if weather conditions prevent the helicopter from flying and where access by road is preferable.

A team comprises one pilot, one doctor and one paramedic, who also serves as navigator on the outward flight; the front passenger seat rotates so that the paramedic can perform both tasks. It takes at least two years additional training to become an air ambulance paramedic because the role requires a working knowledge of the aircraft, as well as the skill to deal with the most serious injuries. This means that the air ambulance brings the highest level of medical help possible, aided by strict protocols to ensure that it is fully equipped at all times.

When a 999 call is made, the handler will determine whether it should be passed to the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) desk, which is constantly monitored by a paramedic, who decides whether the helicopter is needed. In fact, the HEMS desk coordinates all the emergency services right up to delivery at hospital, using a dedicated telephone line. During daytime, the helicopter aims to be airborne in four minutes: eight minutes at night.

Patients can be delivered to any local hospital and Frimley Park Hospital has a helipad, being a secondary trauma centre. However, they generally go to either Southampton General Hospital or John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, depending on the services required. There is plenty of variety in HIOWAA's work, which breaks down thus:

- Road traffic accidents: 33%
- Cardio/collapse: 25%
- Sport/falls: 18%
- Riding: 16%
- Industrial injury: 4%
- Transfers: 3%

This is a doctor-led service that focuses on the 'golden hour', the critical time available to stabilise the patient in order to maximise the chances of a successful outcome. Stopping bleeding is a priority, and the helicopter carries 4 units of O-negative blood at all times. The doctor can also administer anaesthesia, sedation and pain control.

The Patron of HIOWAA is Ailsa, Lady Montagu of Beaulieu, and the National Patron is Sir David Jason, himself a qualified helicopter pilot.

It costs £7500 per day, £230,000 per month, to operate the service. The NHS supplies the medical staff and medical equipment, though the HIOWAA charity provides additional kit such as helmets, suits and cutting equipment. At Thruxton, there is a simulator room for training and the charity pays for paramedic training. A quiet room is available where crews can shut themselves away if they need to, and counselling is also available.

HIOWAA has recently introduced a programme of schools visits to teach children how and when to call the emergency services, so that they can become '999 super-heroes'.

John ended by listing the ways the public can help:

- By making a donation (70-75p out of every £1 goes to the service)
- By inviting John or Richard along to talk to community groups
- By putting collection pots in places of work, shops and pubs
- By saving used stamps
- By sharing patient stories
- By becoming a volunteer
- By taking on a fundraising challenge, such as bungee jumping, sky diving or abseiling
- By entering the *Flight for Life Lottery*

For more information, visit the HIOWAA website: <http://www.hiowaa.org>



