



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety
Washington, D.C. 20594

September 17, 2019

Attachment 3 – Hospital Interviews

OPERATIONAL FACTORS/HUMAN PERFORMANCE

CEN19FA072



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

John M. Brannen II
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Central Region

Date: 3/14/2019
Person Contacted: Angela Arnold
NTSB Accident Number: CEN19FA072

Narrative:

Ms. Arnold stated that she is the Nurse Manager for the free-standing Meigs Emergency Department for Holzer. She began in the Holzer business office in 1998, subsequently went to nursing school and was hired as a registered nurse in the emergency department. She worked as a charge nurse for 10 years before becoming the trauma coordinator for the hospital for one year, and in 2011 transitioned to her current position.

Ms. Arnold provided a briefing of how air medical services are initiated. A physician, or nurse practitioner will contact a receiving hospital and once the receiving hospital is confirmed they then inform the charge nurse or the emergency department tech that the patient requires air medical services. The emergency department tech or charge nurse will then contact Med-Flight, who is their preferred provider for air medical transport, using their direct line to the Med-Flight dispatch center and request a flight. If Med-Flight is unable to take the flight they would then contact another helicopter air ambulance (HAA) company. They have contact information for several other providers of HAA services and the order they are contacted in is dependent on the geographical circumstances of the requested flight. They send patients to Columbus, Ohio, and Huntington, West Virginia, hospitals and who they contact may be dependent on the receiving hospital location. If an operator refuses a flight, the subsequent HAA operators that are contacted are informed of that the flight has already been turned down and why the previously contacted operators refused the flight.

Ms. Arnold said that in her experience HAA operators will inform them of the reason for a flight refusal. She said that many times the control center personnel will not accept or refuse a flight immediately and will advise that they will call back after consulting the pilot/crew. She said that typically they will contact the HAA operator and the verbiage used is something like: "We have a patient for transport and would like to do a weather check to see if you are available to take our patient."

Ms. Arnold stated that if they contact a subsequent HAA operator, they always relay to them if a flight has been refused by another operator and the reason for the refusal. She also said that the HAA operators typically ask if the flight has already been refused by another operator.

Ms. Arnold said that the accident flight had been turned down by both Med-Flight and HealthNet HAA providers based on weather conditions and in both cases the reason for the turn-down was relayed to the ER tech that initiated the calls.

If Med-Flight refuses a flight it is routine for the Holzer Meigs staff to immediately contact a second HAA provider.

When contacting a HAA provider for a weather check, the HAA provider typically calls back within 2-3 minutes to inform if the flight is refused or accepted, and that 5 minutes is about the longest they have had to wait for such a call-back.

Ms. Arnold was not aware of any time when Survival Flight initiated a call inquiring about a flight that had already been refused by other operators.

Ms. Arnold said that the Holzer Meigs staff doesn't know about the pay structure of the different HAA operators.

She said she was familiar with the term "Helicopter shopping" and that it referred to contacting another HAA operator after a refusal and not informing them of the nature of the previous refusals or attempting to get a HAA flight at a lower price. She noted that she did not believe the term applied simply to contacting additional operators as long as the previous refusals and reasons for refusal were relayed to the subsequent operators.

Normally Holzer Meigs would call Med Flight first and Ms. Arnold said that med-flight and HealthNet have a joint helicopter and that Med Flight would typically handle contacting HealthNet. If the patient were going to Columbus they would then call Survival Flight, and if going to Huntington Area they would call Air-Evac. After contacting 2 HAA operators they would typically start arrangements for ground transport. She noted that they have been contacting Survival Flight because of Survival Flight's statement: "if other services turn you down call us we'll try".

Patient information is not provided until after flight acceptance and only enough high level information is provided for the HAA operator to know which equipment is needed.

Ms Arnold could not recall an instance in which multiple operators were called and the flight accepted which then resulted in them having to turn back after initiating the flight.

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RECORD OF CONVERSATION

John M. Brannen II
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Central Region

Date: 3/14/2019
Person Contacted: Ashley Patterson
NTSB Accident Number: CEN19FA072

Narrative:

Ms. Patterson stated that she works at Holzer Meigs as an emergency room technician. She stated that she was the ERT that contacted the helicopter operators for the accident flight. When asked what steps they normally use, she said that when requesting helicopter air ambulance flights that they always contact Med Flight first to see if they can take the patient. If MedFlight is not able then they contact Health Net but they don't always do that. When asked if operators that refuse flights tell her the reason for the refusal, she said that in her experience if an operator refuses a flight the hospital staff is routinely told why the flight was refused. When asked if she passed this information on to subsequent operators, she said that if she knew the reason for a refusal she would tell the other operator that they had already made a request from another operator that was refused and the reason why it was refused. When asked to give a chronological description of how she went about contacting operators for the accident flight, she said Med Flight was called initially and she was told that they were refusing the flight due to weather. Then, a call was made to Health Net and she informed them that the flight had been offered to Med Flight but that Med Flight had refused the flight due to weather considerations. She was told that Health Net would perform a weather check and would contact her back. She then contacted Survival Flight. At the time Ms. Patterson contacted Survival Flight, Health Net had not yet responded and she said that when she contacted Survival flight, she informed them that Med Flight had refused the flight due to weather but she did not tell them that she had contacted HealthNet because she had not received a reply yet. She said that Survival flight accepted the flight and a few minutes later she received a call from HealthNet refusing the flight due to weather. When asked if she knew what "helicopter shopping" was she said that she hadn't heard the term before the accident happened, but she had heard of it since the accident. When asked if the steps she took in this case were normal she said that they would usually contact MedFlight and then HealthNet if MedFlight refused, but Survival Flight was a new operator that they had begun contacting recently.

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