

Fly or Die

By Dr. Bob Wilson

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It's midnight and I am standing in the Lopez Island Medical Clinic ER with a paramedic and some EMT's. We are discussing the patient that is on the ER stretcher next to us. She has had abdominal pain for a few hours and it is getting worse by the minute. Her x-ray of the chest is normal. The EKG is normal. Her urine test does not show an infection. Her pain is all over her abdomen and it is pretty severe. It could be gallbladder, appendicitis, ischemic bowel, ruptured aorta, ectopic pregnancy, diverticulitis, bowel obstruction, imbedded alien, or some other really neat thing. It is pretty clear that she will need a CAT scan to look at her giblets. But of course the last ferry left hours ago. She is willing to go to the hospital, but she wants to know what the helicopter ride will cost....\$7000 to \$9000. Suddenly her abdominal pain starts getting better.

One of the very best deals around is helicopter insurance. For 75 bucks a year, you can have emergency helicopter transport for your entire family. Still quite a few people choose not to purchase it. Some think that they will not get sick. Every one I have ever met is going to die and most of the time it happens slowly. Others don't want to spend the money. For \$9000 you could buy one hundred and twenty years of helicopter insurance. Maybe you won't need it for the first hundred and ten years, but even then it will still save you money. Some say they will take the ferry. The problem is that if you are critically ill, it is malpractice for me to advise ferry transport not to mention the Washington State Ferry rules. It turns out that they get really peevisish when people try to die between here and Anacortes. Wimps. There are other ways to Anacortes including private plane and boat. We do not have ACLS (advanced cardiac life support) planes or boats. If you have a hang nail, then take the crab boat, the Goodyear Blimp, or swim. But if you are in the middle of a life-threatening hang nail, then you need the whirly bird.

Emergency helicopter transport for the islands is provided by Airlift Northwest. They have aircraft based in a variety of locations around the Puget Sound area. Typically a helicopter is available to arrive on Lopez Island within an hour of being called, often times sooner. The helicopter is able to land at various locations on the island, but most often we choose the

clinic's landing pad. The landings are always attended by our paramedics and EMT's to control traffic, the crowd, and me. Two highly trained flight nurses and a pilot come with the chopper. Even though the area in the helicopter is small, they can handle many kinds of emergencies in flight if the patient becomes unstable. Questions frequently asked by patients include: Is there food served? Yes and it is delicious. Is there an in flight movie? Yes, but it is X rated so only the pilot is allowed to watch. Are the flight nurses attractive? Yes. The one I am thinking of, he is one of the cutest guys I have ever met. We have come to the part of the article where I beg you to buy Airlift insurance. As much as I love looking at a patient square in the eyes as I say "Either we fly you off or you are going to die a terrible, painful death, your family will hate you forever, and you will end up smelling bad", it is just a lot easier to have the policy. Thank you.