



Opinion Piece by Grahame Marshall, Chief Executive Officer Royal Flying Doctor Service (WA)

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RFDS innovation continues through 80 years in WA

The flying doctors have been delivering life-saving services to every corner of Western Australia now for more than 80 years.

I'm very proud of our history, the reputation the RFDS has established in WA over the past 80 years, and our recognized leadership as aero medical innovators.

More and more today "Innovation" appears to be a buzz word leading many to question what does "innovation" actually mean?

The RFDS has many tangible examples of innovation throughout its history, from day one where the concept of flying a doctor to a patient in need of medical care in remote and inaccessible areas was hugely innovative, leading us to today with five operating bases across WA, a fleet of 14 state of the art Pilatus PC12 "flying intensive care units", and the first fully equipped aero medical jet in Australia, our Rio Tinto Life Flight Jet.

In WA this enables us to respond by air to almost 9,000 patients annually, nearly 26,000 remote clinic patients annually, and almost 32,000 patients by telehealth remote consultations - and continue to be there for West Australians wherever and whenever they need us.

Covering a state comprising over 2.5 million square kilometers, last year we flew more than eight million kilometres, and none of this would be possible without the innovative DNA that underpins the culture of the RFDS.

The challenge for the RFDS is not only to keep up with a continuing growth in the demand for our services as our state expands and our population grows, but to do so by ensuring we remain at the forefront of innovation by developing and utilising the very latest in technology and state of the art equipment, and providing the very best aero medical care available anywhere in the world.

To ensure we are able to continue to deliver our life-saving services wherever and whenever we're needed, we have to continually find new ways to expand our reach, improve our ability to respond quickly, and increase our capabilities.

The RFDS is now increasingly commercially minded and seen as a leader in aero medical innovation and capability around the globe.

Last year we launched our Aero Medical capital raising Fund; designed to secure the long-term future of the RFDS, by continuing to improve our capability, and build a stronger and more sustainable foundation for our business into the future.

Here are a few examples of how we continue to anticipate and prepare for the future needs of our patients; early this year we will open a new operating base in Broome, which has now become our busiest patient hub in the state's north. Broome will be the first new RFDS base in WA in 50 years.

We recently developed and introduced an innovative bariatric stretcher and hydraulic loading and transport system designed specifically to lift and carry larger and heavier patients weighing up to 300 kilograms.

Transporting these patients - safely and comfortably, and ensuring the occupational health and safety of our staff - has been an emerging challenge that our team recognised early and worked hard to develop an innovative, bespoke solution to benefit many in the community.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service is embracing cutting edge technology not only in its aircraft but also for the training of its medical staff.

We have developed a Pilatus PC12 aero medical aircraft simulator on site at our Jandakot base, which is proving to be an excellent training tool.

The purpose built aircraft fuselage is identical to that of the Pilatus PC-12 aircraft that comprises 14 of the 15 aircraft in our current RFDS fleet.

The aero medical training simulator has now been incorporated into a fully equipped real 'simulation centre,' which includes the use of medical mannequins, ultra sound, and a smart tablet interface system so that our medical staff can use "virtual" contemporary equipment to simulate "real life" training.

The aircraft simulator provides a very realistic environment so that our doctors and nurses can complete their training in a confined environment, which represents the normal space that they manage their patients within, when in flight.

Our next step from this will be the establishment of a full Aero Medical Training Centre of Excellence where training for our medical and aviation staff is cutting edge, and world's best practice.

The RFDS is without doubt, the most trusted pre-eminent service of its kind in the world and strives continually to lead the way – not only in saving lives but also in the way it operates, building on our core expertise in the areas of innovation, capability and leadership.

We use the latest in aviation, medical and communications technology and deliver extensive primary health care and 24-hour emergency service to those who live, work and travel right around WA.

We fully embrace and apply innovation in our treatment of patients, our aviation and medical technology and equipment, and in the training of our staff, and will continue to look into the future to ensure that we are prepared to meet the needs of West Australians, at any time they may call upon us.

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