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Media Release

14 December 2015

A bold new four-year strategic plan aims to help the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) narrow the gap in health and wellness between those living in remote, rural and regional areas and those in the cities. In the first of a series of announcements regarding new and enhanced services, the RFDS is launching a new Patient Transfer road service that will enable the RFDS' South Eastern Section to better serve non-emergency patients in Central Western NSW and ease the pressure on other vital health services.

The rubber hits the road in the Central West for the Flying Doctor

The use of aircraft to deliver medical services coupled with the pedal radio and then the diversification from emergency retrievals into the delivery of a wide range of primary and allied healthcare services to remote, rural and regional communities are examples of the innovation that has become a hallmark of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). They have been delivering the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia for almost 90 years.

Now one of the world's first and largest aeromedical services, with the help of the Dubbo Support Group, is launching a fleet of Patient Transfer road vehicles in the Central West and metropolitan areas of NSW. The new service will support the movement of non-emergency patients between medical facilities. In the past year the RFDS' South Eastern Section transported 8,500 patients. There are currently 261,734 people in the Western NSW Local Health District, which is the second most sparsely populated area in NSW¹.

The first Patient Transfer road vehicles, equipped just like the RFDS aircraft, will be based in: Bourke, Cobar, Dubbo, Lightning Ridge, Orange and Sydney (Bankstown airport), which will serve as a metropolitan hub. The vehicles are able to carry a wide variety of patient types and have compatible patient handling systems with RFDS fixed wing aircraft. The focus of the initial deployment is to support the Western New South Wales Local Health District centred on Dubbo.

"The launch of a road vehicle service adds to our traditional aeromedical operations as an extension to the services the Flying Doctor already offers to those living in remote, rural and regional areas," said Greg Sam, Chief Executive Officer of the RFDS SE.

"The Patient Transfer road vehicles will be based in the areas where most of our patient flow originates, but the operation can be scaled up to include other locations, according to need," he added.

The new Patient Transfer service offers many benefits;

¹ *Strategic Health Services Plan 2013 -2016*, Western NSW Local Health District
[http://www.wnswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/UserFiles/files/About%20Us%20\(Western%20NSW%20LHD\)/Strategic%20Plan%20Information%20Pack.pdf](http://www.wnswlhd.health.nsw.gov.au/UserFiles/files/About%20Us%20(Western%20NSW%20LHD)/Strategic%20Plan%20Information%20Pack.pdf)

- Patients in regional NSW can be moved between health facilities in conjunction with Local Health Districts in order to offer closer, more cost effective specialised patient transfer;
- The new service will enable the RFDS SE to offer a greater continuity of care for many patients between hospital and home. A non-emergency patient needing clinical care during a transfer may be attended by the same flight nurse from point of origin to final destination;
- The timely repatriation of patients will also free up additional local and metropolitan hospital beds;
- The use of common litters (stretchers) on the RFDS SE Patient Transfer road vehicles and aircraft and the use of cutting-edge equipment, such as Bariatric and Special Purpose Litters, will ensure a more comfortable Patient Transfer experience for patients who can be moved between different modes of transport without changing litters;
- RFDS SE Patient Transfer road vehicles will be equipped like RFDS SE aircraft and crewed by its medical professionals;
- Transferring patients to/ from hospital and their homes also has the social benefit of getting patients back to their families and communities more quickly.

“This new service is a big win for Central Western NSW and honours a promise made by the RFDS SE board to base more services in Dubbo. To that end, further announcements will follow during the next few months,” said Mr Sam.

“It’s important not just to see this as a one-off event, but to view it in the context of our 2015-19 strategic plan whose principal aim is to reduce the well-documented gap in health and wellness between those living in remote, rural and regional areas and those in cities.”

“In the past year the RFDS SE healthcare clinics reached almost 40,000 patients – another year-on-year increase. Our clinics are in high demand and we continue to review and plan our services and operations to ensure that we are able to treat more patients in the most effective way.”

The RFDS SE is expanding its service profile and footprint by providing an increasing range of services, which are reaching more people and more communities. Having consolidated retrieval and emergency services capacity, the South Eastern Section has invested in and expanded additional primary care services from their Broken Hill, Dubbo and Moomba bases. They are working with local health services and other organisations to bridge gaps in clinical and patient transport services to improve access to care in remote, rural and regional locations.

“The communities we serve are at the heart of everything we do and partnerships are another innovative way the Flying Doctor funds vital new medical services,” said Mr Sam.

“The launch of the Patient Transport road service is a continuation of the long and mutually beneficial relationship we have enjoyed with the people of the Central West since we opened the Dubbo Base in 1999. By the end of the 2015/16 financial year the Dubbo Support Group will have raised over \$2 million for the RFDS SE.”

“This includes \$100,000 for the upgrade to the Dubbo Base medical centre, \$150,000 to the purchase and medical fit-out of the Patient Transfer road vehicle to be based in Dubbo and \$100,000 to the fit-outs of two other vehicles to be based in Bourke and Lightning Ridge.

“In recognition of this generous donation and the longstanding support they have given us over the past 16 years, “Proudly Donated by the Dubbo Support Group” will be detailed on

the side the Dubbo vehicle. The kind assistance of the Lightning Ridge Support group will also be acknowledged in a similar manner on their vehicle.”

“Time may pass, technology may change, but the Flying Doctor will always be more than a service and a part of the communities it serves.” Added Mr Sam.

Event Details:

What: Dubbo launch of new RFDS SE Patient Transfer road vehicle service - including CEO introduction, simulation of patient transfer between RFDS SE Patient Transfer road vehicle and aircraft using common Litter and Bariatric/Special Purpose Litter.

Who: Greg Sam, CEO, RFDS SE; the Hon. Troy Grant MP, Deputy Premier of NSW; Terry Clark, President of Dubbo Support Group; RFDS SE Pilot/ Flight Nurse and RFDS SE Patient Transfer road vehicle staff.

When: Monday, 14 December, 09.30am

Where: RFDS Dubbo Base, Dubbo City Regional Airport, Cooreena Rd, Dubbo NSW 2830.

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For more information or photographs, contact:

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ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section conducted almost 5,000 clinics, took over 6,400 telehealth calls, had over 53,500 patient contacts and transported almost 8,500 patients.