



The Hon Jillian Skinner MP

Minister for Health

Minister for Medical Research

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW AMBULANCE PLANE WELCOMED

One of two new NSW Air Ambulance planes capable of transporting patients needing complex heart/lung bypass equipment was officially launched at Mascot today.

The Minister for Health and Minister for Medical Research, Jillian Skinner, was joined by descendants of Australian aviatrix Nancy Bird-Walton to commission the first Beechcraft King Air 350, part of a new 10-year contract with the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Under the contract, five new state-of-the-art planes will gradually be brought into service (a second Beechcraft King Air 350 and three new Beechcraft King Air 200s) to replace the current four King Air 200s in the Ambulance fleet. All five planes should be operating by July.

“This is great news for patients across regional and remote NSW because the larger 350 aircraft fly faster, have greater range and, importantly, have greater payload capacity,” Minister Skinner said.

“They can carry high acuity patients that require additional medical staff and complex equipment, such as ECMO (extra-corporeal membrane oxygenation machines) and intra-aortic balloon pumps, and can also carry patients weighing up to 250 kilograms.”

Each flight is crewed by an experienced pilot and triple certificate flight nurse, and all aircraft are installed with the latest safety equipment including infra-red technology to assist with night landings.

“Last year, Air Ambulance carried more than 5000 patients, flying nearly 2500 missions for 6500 hours from Melbourne to Brisbane and from the Darling River to Lord Howe Island.

“This new plane, with its increased capabilities, becomes an extension of the general hospital ward, intensive care unit, emergency department and labour ward and, as such, it is my pleasure today to talk to some of the flight nurses manning these trips, and thank them for their dedication and excellent care, often in very difficult circumstances,” Minister Skinner said.

“This is a pioneering day for the Ambulance Service of NSW as it is the first time a 350 aircraft will be used as a dedicated aeromedical aircraft in Australia.

“It is therefore fitting that the aircraft be named after the extraordinary Nancy Bird-Walton, a pioneer in Australian aviation and a woman who was instrumental in establishing the first fixed wing air ambulance service in NSW in 1967,” Minister Skinner said.

“It’s an honour to have her daughter, Tweed, and grand-daughter, Anna, here today to officially launch this new aircraft.”

ECMO

(Extra-Corporeal Membrane Oxygenation Machine)

- ECMO machines continuously pump blood from a patient through a membrane oxygenator, which removes carbon dioxide and adds oxygen thereby supporting the patient’s heart and lungs, while treatment for underlying illness takes place.
- ECMO is commonly used at major teaching hospitals for people with heart/lung failure prior to, or following, cardiac operations, or those awaiting a heart/lung transplant.
- ECMO is now also being used for critically ill patients suffering underlying conditions such as asthma, obesity, chronic lung disease and diabetes.
- ECMO has also been used for swine flu patients as it gives their lungs time to recover from the illness.
- Ambulance Medical Retrieval Teams, together with the ECMO centres at St Vincents and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, currently provide the ability to rapidly treat patients all over NSW at small hospitals using ECMO and transport them back to Sydney by road or using the ambulance service helicopters while on ECMO, one of very places in the world able to provide this high level of care. The new Fixed Wings will enable the Ambulance Service to do ECMO transports and will extend the reach around the state.

INTRA-AORTIC BALLON PUMPS

- The pumps involve a helium-filled balloon inserted into the aorta through the skin to improve blood flow.
- They are used for severe heart failure; and before and after heart surgery, and other types of severe shock.