

Avera Careflight Expands to Pierre

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Avera Health announces expansion of its Careflight program to better serve rural residents and improve response times across the vast 72,000-square-mile region that Avera serves.

This expansion involves basing a fixed-wing aircraft in Pierre. Avera's Careflight program recently celebrated 30 years of service, and Careflight aircraft have previously been located in Sioux Falls and Aberdeen. There will continue to be a Careflight helicopter based in Aberdeen, as well as a fixed wing plane and helicopter in Sioux Falls.

"Avera is concerned about every single resident within our service area. When a critical illness or injury occurs, the sooner a patient can receive specialty critical care services, the better outcomes he or she will experience," said Doug Ekeren, Administrative Lead for the Emergency Medicine Service Line at Avera.

"Pierre is virtually centered in the state of South Dakota. Basing a plane there naturally allows faster response times to areas of central and western portions of South Dakota," Ekeren said.

Careflight helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft are designed as airborne ICUs, staffed by professionals highly trained in critical care. The two types of aircraft Careflight provides – the helicopter and fixed wing – serve different needs. The helicopter flies within an approximate 100-mile radius of its home base. It offers "door-to-door" services to facilities with a helipad, and can land at the scene of accidents.

The fixed wing can fly at higher speeds and greater distances. Ground ambulances take patients to and from the airport in support of the fixed-wing unit.

Careflight staffing will be expanded as appropriate to serve three sites instead of two. Staffing generally involves a flight nurse, paramedic and pilot. Specialized teams are also at the ready for trauma and critical care, neonatal transports, obstetrics and pediatrics.

More than just a fast way to get patients to the hospital, Careflight is an extension of a hospital critical care unit and Emergency Department. "For critical patients, often the difference between life and death depends on getting the appropriate level of care within a crucial time window. Stationing Careflight aircraft at key locations places lifesaving care within reach for the largest number of patients," Ekeren said.

Careflight was the first helicopter transport program in South Dakota. In its 30-year history, Careflight has transported 25,000 patients.