



ISSUE 39 SPRING 2024

airway

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE AIR AMBULANCE COMMUNITY

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Learning from the trailblazers

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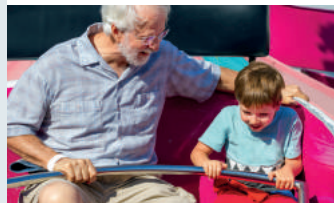


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BY CSMA

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Simmy Akhtar

Chief Executive



In our first issue of Airway in 2024, we are proud to shine a spotlight on some of the remarkable women leading the way in our sector, as well as providing a refreshing and much needed focus on reproductive health.

Jessica Thomas-Mourne, from Devon Air Ambulance, conducted some research recently which demonstrated that in the UK, just one in four critical care paramedics is a woman and one in five critical care doctors is a woman. Additionally, according to data from the Civil Aviation Authority* in 2022, only 3.7% of helicopter pilots are women. The ambulance services are similarly under-represented by women at the highest level.

One of the critical ways in which we can help to change this picture is by ensuring that female role models are visible to future generations – the saying ‘You have to see it to be it’ will resonate with many. In 2024, the International Women’s Day campaign theme of ‘Inspire Inclusion’ emphasises exactly that – and in our main feature this issue (pages 8-10), we hear from four professionals who are thriving and excelling at their chosen careers in the air ambulance services. It is clear from reading what each of them has to say that systemic change must also be accompanied by individual vision, grit, focus, determination and sheer hard work.

The presentation about reproductive health by East Anglian Air Ambulance’s Sarah Atkins and Dr Sarah McNeilly at the AAUK Conference in November was a hit and has prompted important – and overdue – conversations to begin. EAAA is well known, as many air ambulance charities are, for its open communication but even so, there were many issues around reproductive health – periods, menopause, miscarriage, terminations, fertility treatment, planned and unplanned pregnancy – that employees just hadn’t felt able to speak about. This has changed dramatically for EAAA and I’d encourage all colleagues to read the article on page 13 and wonder how these issues might be affecting their organisation.

Also in this issue is an Associate Member Spotlight on Tower Lotteries, two patient stories, and all the inspirational news from AAUK – including some amazing partnership news – and the air ambulance charities. This includes a news report on an incredible gesture from our national charity partner Kwik Fit in response to one young girl having her riding kit stolen half way through a charity challenge to raise money for Lincs & Notts Air Ambulance (which she still finished!).

You may notice that Airway is slightly shorter than last time and this is because it is the first of three issues this year, rather than two, so we can be in touch more often with all the latest from the air ambulance community.

You’re always very welcome to give us your feedback on Airway – including our brand new look – and send suggestions about topics we might tackle in future issues – please see the contact details on this page.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

* www.caa.co.uk/data-and-analysis/approved-persons-and-organisations/personnel-licensing-statistics/pilot-licence-holders-by-age-and-sex/

Champion Oliver Townend in the saddle for AAUK

AAUK has welcomed Oliver Townend, the renowned British three-day eventing champion, as an Ambassador for the organisation. In his role as Ambassador, Oliver will engage in campaigns and initiatives aimed at highlighting the indispensable role of air ambulance charities across the UK. His involvement will focus on increasing public awareness and championing the remarkable work carried out by the air ambulance community, emphasising their crucial role in providing critical pre-hospital care and emergency trauma and medical services.

Oliver Townend is a distinguished figure in the world of three-day eventing, whose impressive career has been marked by numerous accolades and triumphs, including victories in the Olympic Games, Badminton, Burghley Horse Trials and Kentucky Three-Day Event.

Oliver commented: "I am truly honoured. The swift and life-saving interventions, often responding to unfortunate riding incidents, conducted by air ambulance charities play a vital role in critical situations. I am committed to using my platform to raise awareness and support for these essential charities that significantly contribute to saving lives."

Simmy Akhtar, CEO of AAUK, said: "We are thrilled to welcome Oliver Townend as an Ambassador for Air Ambulances UK. His dedication to excellence and his influential presence within the equestrian world will significantly bolster our mission to support air ambulance charities. Oliver's involvement will amplify our efforts to save lives and improve patient outcomes across the UK."



New Chair for APPGAA

Pete Wishart MP was elected as the new Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Air Ambulances (APPGAA) following an Extraordinary General Meeting on 30 January 2024.

This follows the resignation of the former Chair, Robert Courts MP, due to his appointment as Solicitor General for England and Wales on 7 December 2023.

Pete was previously Vice-Chair of the APPGAA and an active member since its relaunch on 5 July 2023. He is the Scottish National Party MP for Perth and North Perthshire, and has been an MP since 2001.

The APPGAA aims to raise the quality of care and effectiveness of air ambulance charities for patients through engagement with political leaders and policy makers on key issues that relate to improvements in the delivery of the UK's air ambulance charities' lifesaving services. **The other three officers of the APPGAA are:**



Rushanara Ali
MP (Lab)



Kelly Tolhurst
MP (Con)



Paul Holmes
MP (Con)

The other members of the APPGAA are:

Karl McCartney (Con)
Wendy Morton (Con)
Carolyn Harris (Lab)
Gavin Newlands (SNP)
Michael Fabricant (Con)
Henry Smith (Con)
Martyn Day (SNP)
Matt Western (Lab)
Peter Aldous (Con)
Ruth Cadbury (Lab)
Suzanne Webb (Con)
Stephen Metcalfe (Con)
Alberto Costa (Con)
Scott Mann (Con)
Caroline Nokes (Con)
Tracey Crouch (Con)
Sarah Elisabeth Mullally (House of Lords)
Matt Hancock (Independent)
Arlene Isobel Foster (House of Lords)
Lord Berkeley (House of Lords)

Royally Honoured

The air ambulance community is celebrating two individuals who had honours bestowed on them in the New Year's Honours List.

East Anglian Air Ambulance (EAAA) Critical Care Paramedic Carl Smith was awarded the Medal of the Order of the British Empire (BEM). Carl has been a member of the College of Paramedics since its inception, he has worked for the East of England Ambulance Service since 2000 and, for the last 12 years, he has been a much-loved and respected Critical Care Paramedic with EAAA.



Carl Smith

When he's not working as a paramedic, Carl spends his spare time as an on-call firefighter. He also volunteers for Norfolk Accident Rescue Service (NARS), where he responds from home to support crews at the most serious incidents.

Victor Inyang, Medical Director at EAAA, says: "I am always inspired by Carl's dedication to serving the community. This award in recognition of the impact Carl had made on the lives of others is richly deserved."

Advanced Practitioner in Critical Care Vicki Brown, from Great Western Air Ambulance Charity (GWAAC) received the King's Ambulance Service Medal in the New Year Honours.

The King's Ambulance Service Medal is awarded to members of the NHS Ambulance Service (including air ambulances) for distinguished service marked by exceptional ability, merit and conduct.



Vicki Brown

Vicki has been a paramedic for nearly 20 years and joined GWAAC in 2012. In that time she has received much recognition for her achievements and dedication to GWAAC and paramedicine. Vicki was one of four recipients of the King's Ambulance Service Medal this year; she said, "I feel very honoured and humbled to receive this award. I am proud to be a paramedic and will continue to work to progress the profession as best I can."

Vicki's GWAAC colleague Dr Philip Cowburn MBE commented: "Vicki has dedicated her career to advancing paramedic practice and delivering improved prehospital patient care. She remains an example to all, acting as a superb role model and inspirational frontline clinical leader."



AAUK delight as AGEAS partnership renews

AAUK continues to work with Ageas in 2024 after a busy 2023 that saw great engagement from Ageas employees and leadership through Ageas' Small Change Big Difference payroll giving initiative, lots of tea and biscuits through AAUK's Brew for the Crew campaigns, and fun with all the family at Winterfest, hosted by Ageas at the end of the year.

ageas®

Ageas also ran a hugely successful special promotion through one of their price comparison websites, donating £1 to AAUK for every policy sold. AAUK is looking forward to welcoming their CEO and some of the Senior Leadership Team for a base visit at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance in April.

Ageas is one of the largest general insurers in the United Kingdom, providing insurance to almost five million customers. It offers car, home, pet and small business insurance through brokers, affinity partners and its own brands.



Kwik Fit presents Molly with £1000

Kwik Fit is a proud charity partner of AAUK, raising essential funds for all 21 regional air ambulance charities and also spreading awareness about the indispensable services air ambulance charities provide.



In a wonderful gesture acknowledging her extraordinary courage and resilience, Kwik Fit presented Molly Harris, who won the Air Ambulances UK Award for Young Person of the Year last November, with a £1,000 gift card to replace her stolen riding gear. This was handed over at the Lincs & Notts Air Ambulance (LNAA) base, where Molly also collected her Young Person of the Year award as she was unable to attend the Air Ambulances UK Annual Awards of Excellence on 30 November.

Molly won her Award for her incredible bravery and quick thinking when she helped save her mum's life after a horse-riding accident – and also for her determination to raise money for LNAA during their 6k-a-day-in-May challenge, which she did on horseback - even finishing bareback after her gear was stolen.

Simmy Akhtar, Air Ambulances UK CEO, said: "We are immensely grateful to Kwik Fit for their support of Molly and Air Ambulances UK. Their commitment to our cause has been truly inspiring, and we're excited about continuing our partnership to support air ambulance charities across the UK to save even more lives and improve patient outcomes".



InHealth staff vote for AAUK

Healthcare organisation InHealth is supporting Air Ambulances UK as its Charity of the Year 2024 as nominated and voted for by staff. As a healthcare organisation specialising in diagnostic and healthcare solutions, InHealth's mission is to make healthcare better.

The company says it is delighted to support such a worthwhile cause and it encourages all its staff to get involved with fundraising activities.



Sika chooses AAUK

Sika is a specialty chemicals company that develops and produces systems and products for bonding, sealing, damping, reinforcing and protecting in the building sector and motor vehicle industry.

Following a staff vote, AAUK has been selected as their 2024 Charity of the Year. Each year, Sika holds a charity cycle to raise awareness and funds for their annual partner; AAUK are looking forward to supporting the team later in the year.



Pharmacy2U dispenses funds to AAUK

Pharmacy2U is the UK's first and largest online pharmacy, helping over 750,000 patients in England manage their NHS repeat prescriptions from request through to delivery.

Pharmacy2U staff voted for their charities of the year, with AAUK being selected as one of four charities to be supported in 2024.

Peninsula Group commits to raising £1m in new partnership



Peter Done

AAUK has announced a new partnership with Peninsula Group, a global leader in providing employment law, HR, and health & safety services to businesses worldwide.

During the three-year partnership, Peninsula has committed to raising £1 million to enhance the lifesaving efforts of air ambulance charities across the UK.

Peter Done, CEO and Founder of Peninsula Group, said: "We are absolutely delighted to support Air Ambulances UK for the next three years. We asked our employees to nominate charities that were close to their heart, and it was clear from these nominations just how much our support could help. So we're delighted to make this commitment to them today.

"To raise this ambitious target, our employees will take part in multiple fundraising activities throughout the partnership. The company will also be enabling employees to sign up for payroll giving. All fundraising activities and payroll deductions will be matched pound for pound in corporate donations. There is so much that we can do to help, and we're excited about the difference we can make."

The Warwickshire & Northamptonshire Air Ambulance (WNAA) service has welcomed the Care Quality Commission (CQC) 'Outstanding' rating of its clinical services. Following the unannounced inspection at the service's operating base at Coventry Airport, inspectors formed their overall judgement using a combination of information from ongoing monitoring of intelligence data about the service, alongside information given by the provider, patients, public, and other organisations.

Commenting on the report, The Air Ambulance Service (TAAS) Chief Operating Officer, Richard Clayton, said: "I am absolutely delighted by the CQC's overall rating of our WNAA service, especially as this is our first rating, and it follows an overall Outstanding rating of our Derbyshire, Leicestershire & Rutland Air Ambulance service late last year. It's fantastic that the inspectors were able to see and articulate the passion and commitment that exists within everyone across the wider charity; we can only achieve reports like this because of everyone's hard work, everyone involved should be immensely proud."



LAA raises £1.2m... ...but needs more

London's Air Ambulance's Black and White Gala at Raffles London gathered huge media attention thanks to some very special guests – and it raised a remarkable £1.2 million, surpassing all previous galas. The charity says that the funds will go towards the replacement of its two aging helicopters, for which it needs £15 million by September 2024.



The event was attended by a number of VIP guests, including Tom Cruise, Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta and band Sister Sledge.

As the charity reaches the final months of its Up Against

Time campaign, it has taken the unusual step of urgently appealing to government for public funding to supplement the Up Against Time appeal, which is behind where it was expected to be, with cost-of-living challenges and the war in Ukraine weighing heavily on fundraising. The charity is asking for government support of just over £3m for 25% of the helicopter costs.

LAA's royal patron, His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, attended the evening and met with some of LAA's medical and operational crew. He spoke to the audience in support of the charity, saying: "We gather tonight to help as many people as possible benefit from top class care in the silhouette of London's Air Ambulance's flying lifelines. As a former pilot for East Anglia Air Ambulance, I know just how vital the work of air ambulance teams across the country is and the truly life-saving difference it can make to deliver urgent medical care wherever injury strikes."

Get ready for HELIFEST

Cornwall Air Ambulance has revamped and moved Helifest, its one-day blue light festival. The family day out is taking place on Saturday 6 July 2024 at a new venue, Scorrier House near Redruth.



Visitors can meet Cornwall Air Ambulance crew and see the helicopter, with teams from Cornwall Blood Bikes, the British Army, Cornwall Fire & Rescue Service, HM Coastguard, NHS, Devon & Cornwall Police, RNLI and West Cornwall Search & Rescue also in attendance. There will also be entertainment for all the family with live music from local bands, inflatables, rides and more.

Devon Air Ambulance opens memory garden

Devon Air Ambulance has opened a new online space dedicated to the memory of loved ones.

Family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues are encouraged to leave special messages and memories in the new online Memory Garden. The first tribute came from the charity's founder Ann Ralli, a mother who turned her personal tragedy into a beacon of hope for her community and the county of Devon, a lasting tribute to her beloved son Ceri.



You have to see it to be it



International Women's Day (IWD) is a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. Each year, this day serves as a powerful reminder of the progress made towards gender equality and highlights the work that still needs to be done.

In 2024, the campaign theme 'Inspire Inclusion' emphasises the importance of diversity and empowerment in all aspects of society.

Jessica Thomas-Mourne, HEMS (Helicopter Emergency Medical Service) Specialist Paramedic in Critical Care, carried out some research recently, which demonstrated that although in the UK women make up around half of all doctors and paramedics, within HEMS just one in five HEMS doctors and one in four HEMS paramedics are women.

Reflecting this year's IWD campaign theme of inclusion, we hand over the rest of this article to some of the remarkable women who have made their mark in our sector and whose presence makes it all the more likely that girls pondering their possible future careers now will see enough trailblazers out there to know that this is something they could do too.



Fleur Rath

Specialist Paramedic in Critical Care,
Great Western Air Ambulance

Who or what influenced you as a child in terms of your career?

My mum was probably the biggest influence on my career. Following an incident where she fell down the stairs, couldn't feel her legs and wasn't feeling at all well, myself and my brother called 999 and an amazing ambulance crew came out, were amazing with my mum, brother and me, and from that moment on, I think I always knew I wanted to be a paramedic.

What challenges did you face in your education and career?

The hardest part of it all was probably when I first started with the ambulance service; there were definitely challenges with being a young female paramedic in a predominantly older male world. However, I think lots has changed in ambulance services across the country, which is making them more inclusive and supportive places to work.

Are there any ongoing challenges today linked to your gender?

I am lucky to feel I haven't had any challenges related to my gender at work; but in the bigger world of PHEM (Pre-Hospital Emergency Medicine) I think that females are under-represented and there's huge scope for us to be more supportive of females paramedics, doctors and nurses who want to get into pre-hospital care. The guys I work with have been a huge part of encouraging that locally – such as running 'Fem in PHEM' days over the last few years, which have been a huge support to doctors wanting to get on to the PHEM training programme – and we need to do more things like that.

What do you find most rewarding about your role?

There are so many rewarding aspects but being able to meet former patients and their families is incredibly special and important. On scene, being able to give advanced analgesia and sort out patients' pain to a much higher level is probably one of the most rewarding things we can do.



Hannah Nobbs

HEMS First Officer, Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance

Who or what influenced you as a child in terms of your career?

My Dad was a physics teacher, so my curiosity about how things work was encouraged by my parents and teachers at school. My A-level physics teacher had a degree in aerospace engineering and that made me aware that it was something I might be interested in when I completed school. I was enthused about helicopters following a visit to the international helicopter museum in Weston-Super-Mare as a teenager and more recently discovered that I had been given an air ambulance toy that flew over my cot, so maybe that influence was there all along!

How did your career journey bring you to this point?

In summary, it has been a quite an adventure with lots of hard work and much luck in timings along the way. A journey via helicopter design, working for the RNLI as an Innovation Scout, being involved in the regulation of Spaceflight and several years as a volunteer for Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance, who I am now proud to fly for.

Are there ongoing challenges today linked to your gender?

I have had an entirely positive experience from within the flying industry with regards to gender and have felt welcomed, encouraged and treated equally to my peers. Most of the engagement with the public is positive and many are enthusiastic about seeing a pilot who is female. There have been occasions where I have been asked if I will get to be a 'proper pilot' one day, or if I was the passenger. It doesn't seem that my male colleagues get asked the same question - so my hope, over time, is that by being seen out and about more, it might make it a bit more normal for people. My best friend's son thinks all helicopter pilots are female because I am the only pilot he has met so far!

There are also some practicalities about HEMS missions, such as not knowing how long you will be away from the base. That means being opportunistic about toilet breaks when we get to hospital or back to base to refuel. A two-piece flying overall has changed my life in this respect.

Do you think there could be more female representation within HEMS? If so, what steps can the sector take to achieve this?

There absolutely could and should be. I think cost is a huge barrier for anyone training as a civilian pilot, but when reflecting on why there aren't more female HEMS pilots or commercial helicopter pilots in general, my personal view is that often it is a question of risk appetite. I don't mean from a safety point of view - I mean risk of financial uncertainty. I think young women are often encouraged to be risk averse and be careful and think of how our career choices affect others. I remember worrying if I was being too selfish wanting to take on the financial risk of being a pilot, because ultimately it is a huge investment and can all be for nothing if you can't get a flying job or lose your medical.

What do you find most rewarding about your role?

There are so many aspects of my job that are rewarding! Top of the list is the sense of purpose from being able to help people. It's a privilege to be a part of someone's life and hopefully contribute to a better outcome on what could be the worst day for our patients and their families. I love working with the rest of the crew at Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance, I've learned a lot from flying with our experienced captains, and I am in awe of my medical colleagues.

Then there is the flying, landing and taking off from places we've never been to before... When the night is clear and we are wearing night vision goggles it can be so beautiful and we often see shooting stars. The other aspect I really appreciate, after 15 years of working predominantly at a desk, is just how active our day can be. I love working outside (despite the challenges of extreme winter or summer conditions) and it makes me feel very liberated.

What recommendations or advice would you offer to women aspiring to work within HEMS?

Keep moving towards your goal, but don't worry if it's a longer or more winding path than you hoped; it all builds useful experience. Build your networks and talk to those who do the role you are interested in. Make the most of volunteering opportunities for air ambulance charities. For aspiring helicopter pilots, get very familiar with weather conditions, as most of the stressful decisions we have to make are due to the ever-changing weather in the UK.



Sinead Keane

Critical Care Paramedic
Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust

Who or what influenced you as a child in terms of your career?

I was influenced by my grandfather who was a doctor of tropical medicine and my mother who is a specialist hydrotherapist.

How did your career journey bring you to this point?

I was fortunate enough that one of my mentors was a critical care paramedic in SECAMB (South East Coast Ambulance Service) and it provided me with an insight into critical care. I knew I wanted to focus my career in this specialist area and once qualifying as a paramedic I took a few years to consolidate my skills before focusing on becoming a critical care paramedic. I started my paramedic journey at SECAMB before transferring to EEAST (East of England Ambulance Service), where I worked as a frontline paramedic, before applying for a role in training and education. I spent a few years in training and education before applying for HEMS and getting a job with EHAAT.

Are there ongoing challenges today linked to your gender?

There is always a challenge in any role and managing competing demands in your personal and professional life. I work alongside some amazing and inspiring women within EHAAT who are incredible role models.

Do you think there could be more female representation within HEMS? If so, what steps can the sector take to achieve this?

There definitely could be more female representation in HEMS and I feel that the sector could think about flexible working, family friendly rotas and improving the accessibility for women.

What recommendations or advice would you offer to women aspiring to work within HEMS?

My best advice is to gain experience as a paramedic and get involved in clinical governance days, training and other CPD (Continuing Professional Development) opportunities that you have available.



Zoey Spurgeon

Critical Care Paramedic
Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust

Who or what influenced you as a child in terms of your career?

I knew from a fairly young age that I wanted work in healthcare, specifically with EHAAT (Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust). A family friend was a HEMS paramedic here, and I was lucky enough to visit the airbase as a teenager.

How did your career journey bring you to this point?

It takes a lot of hard work - and shift work - to be a paramedic, but it's very rewarding. Once I succeeded in becoming a paramedic, I knew I wanted to be a critical care paramedic for the air ambulance. Achieving that has been the pinnacle of my career.

To achieve this, I followed the required attributes of a Critical Care Paramedic (CCP), by studying hard and volunteering for a local critical care scheme before passing the air ambulance recruitment process.

Are there ongoing challenges today linked to your gender?

No, at EHAAT we are lucky to have inspirational women in all levels of the organisation, from the CEO to the consultant team to our amazing doctors and CCPs and to all the charity staff and volunteers.

What do you find most rewarding about your role?

This job enables me to deliver life-saving treatment to our patients whilst working alongside an amazing team. The job is so rewarding, and I am always so inspired by our patients' journeys and hearing about the challenges they have overcome.

What recommendations or advice would you offer to women aspiring to work within HEMS?

My best advice for anyone interested in becoming a CCP in HEMS is to first apply for a paramedic degree. Once qualified, gain experience as most HEMS roles require five years post-registration practice. Use this time to prepare yourself with the knowledge, skills and experience required of a CCP. Consider getting involved with the charity you would love to work for, attend open clinical governance events, look at volunteering, and support the charity with fundraising events. Work hard and stand out.

Wedding dream drives remarkable recovery

That Tuesday morning seemed routine until Anita's phone rang with a call that no wife would ever want to receive.

Her husband Chris Simpson (46), a self-employed car body restorer and repair specialist, was driving his mum's car back from the MOT centre when he collided head-on with a lorry. With his mum's car crumpled and his life hanging in the balance, he was trapped in the wreckage, but astonishingly, as EHAAT's critical care team arrived via their Helimed 07 helicopter based at Earls Colne, he was conscious and talking.

Reflecting on the incident, Chris said: "I only have vague memories, but when I try to think back, I can't help but think about what Anita would have been going through. Not just receiving the news, but being rushed into a police car while trying to process everything and inform the kids. I now know Anita went into auto mode and managed to get hold of family members (Chris' brother-in-law John, his two sons Daniel and Joshua, and Joshua's fiancée Grace) to prepare them."

Pre-hospital Care Doctors, Dr Naomi Pritchard, Dr. Adam Czapan, and Critical Care Paramedic Ben Finbow, assessed Chris at the roadside and provided pain relief before making the decision to fly him to King's College Hospital, where he could receive the specialised medical care he urgently needed.

Chris suffered severe injuries, including extensive fractures in both legs and knees, as well as in his wrist and clavicle. He also had internal bleeding. As he began his recovery in the hospital, his surgeons stressed how fortunate he was to have survived and underlined the severity of his injuries. Throughout his recovery, Chris' unwavering focus remained fixed on a single goal: walking down the aisle for his son's wedding in October 2023.

In the lead up, Chris was invited to tour our North Weald airbase by our patient and family liaison team. He proudly demonstrated his progress toward achieving that cherished milestone with the wedding right around the corner.

"Having that goal of walking down the aisle was so important to my recovery and the progress I've made so far," said Chris. "I wanted to be okay so people didn't have to worry about me on the day – the focus rightly needed to be on Joshua and Grace on what was going to be the most amazing day of their lives."

EHAAT recently followed up with Chris to hear the amazing news that he 'had a lovely day and managed to get by with just a walking stick' though he did hide it out of shot from the photographer! He added: "It's incredible, after being non-weight bearing after leaving the hospital and then having three months where I couldn't move my left leg, to have been able to walk down the aisle. I can't thank the response of EHAAT, the emergency services and the team at King's enough."

Though the crew members who first attended to Chris at the scene couldn't be present during his visit, Critical Care Paramedic Ben Finbow joined via video call between his pre-hospital care responsibilities, which served as a touching reminder of the strong bond that often forms between patients, family members and the crew who worked at the scene to deliver the best possible outcome.

Reflecting on Chris' story and his recovery so far, Ben said: "It was a special moment to reunite with Chris on the phone and witness the amazing progress he's made. Connecting with him and his family was truly a joy. We deeply appreciate the meaningful impact we can have on people's lives day in and day out, and it's all made possible by the incredible support we receive from across Essex & Hertfordshire."

Caroline thrown from Clyde the 'gentle giant'

Mrs Caroline Sansom was enjoying spending time riding her Clydesdale horse, named aptly, Clyde, along with her friend Holly on her horse, Bridget on Aylesbeare Common. Clyde is a purebred Clydesdale and described by Caroline as a 'gentle giant' and very placid, despite his 17.3 hands!

As they rode along, Clyde was suddenly spooked by a noise in the hedgerow – it was only a handful of inquisitive wild horses however, Clyde bolted and started to bronc and rear up. Caroline held on tightly but on the third 'bronc' she tried to grab hold of his mane but was thrown off.



Caroline recalled: "As Clyde bolted, I remember shouting out to Holly, 'Here we go again, this is going to hurt!' and within seconds I fell on to the rough track with big stones and rubble underneath me."

Caroline felt immediate pain in her hip on the right side as her body hit the ground. Her shoulder was also hurting badly. Meanwhile, Clyde had bolted off across the common and Caroline's friend Holly was shouting for help as she held onto her horse amid all the commotion. Thankfully Clyde came strolling

back to the scene of the incident by himself leaving poor Holly needing to hold on to two horses!

Luckily, a couple of nearby walkers were able to help – there was a nurse called Julie who called 999 and another first-aider. When help was on the way, Holly called Caroline's husband to let him know what had happened. Devon's Exeter based helicopter was the first of the emergency services to arrive at the scene. It was already airborne, having been on its way to Plymouth and stood down; it was returning to base when the crew received the report of Caroline's fall.

Caroline explains: "It felt like the helicopter had arrived so quickly, it was literally there within just four or five minutes. The 999 call handler informed us that the heli was on its way and within seconds we heard it overhead, the NHS land ambulance arrived not long afterwards." As she heard the helicopter landing, Caroline knew that help was coming but also thought that she must have done something pretty serious for Devon Air Ambulance to be attending. Her fingers were beginning to feel numb and tingly and that's when she started to cry due to the overwhelming sense of relief:

"The crew that attended me were Specialist Paramedic Cat McMorrow, Dr Lauren Weekes and Pilot Richard Applegarth, they were all amazing! Ironically, I found out later that Cat was also airlifted by the air ambulance 15 years ago after a similar fall from her horse and suffering arm and shoulder injuries! She was therefore experienced in the pitfalls of riding and also understood how to handle our horses too. The crew were brilliant from the moment they arrived to the treatment I received and throughout my helicopter ride they even covered my eyes from the glaring sun as I lay on the stretcher."

Specialist Paramedic in Critical Care, Cat, explained that whilst on scene, she could hear the sound of thundering hooves in the background as the wild horses were particularly curious of the helicopter and weren't spooked by it at all! In fact at one point whilst Cat was on the phone to the hospital to inform them of their imminent arrival, she saw them attempting to take a nibble out of the helicopter.

After being stabilised on scene, Caroline was airlifted to the Royal Devon & Exeter hospital where she had X-Rays of her shoulder and chest. She had fractured her shoulder socket due to its dislocation and had plenty of severe bruising to her hip. Caroline has full recollection of the incident as she was lucky that her riding helmet protected her head in the fall. She has strict instructions not to ride until at least the end of May and is tentatively looking forward to it:

"I'm not overly nervous about riding again but won't know until I'm sat in the saddle. This is my third accident whilst riding Clyde in the last 8 years so here's hoping he behaves himself and stays calm!"

Caroline was keen to make sure that everyone knew how grateful she was for the treatment she received and has even started to look at ways in which she can fundraise for us in the future:

"I can't thank the Devon Air Ambulance crew enough. They do a fantastic job and were able to really keep my spirits up while helping me at the scene of the accident and on board the helicopter. I even got a call a couple of days after the accident from their Patient and Family Support team to see how I was feeling and if I had any questions for them. They really are the best and Devon can't afford to be without them. Our local horse shop (Hidden Oak) and café have subsequently offered to help us with some fundraising activities we would like to get involved with too, so watch this space as we'll be doing something to raise money for them soon. All I can say is that I am grateful to the Devon Air Ambulance supporters who enabled me to receive the care that I did, so please do donate to this wonderful cause if you can."

Starting the conversation on reproductive health



Sarah Atkins
Director of People and Culture,
East Anglian Air Ambulance

Menopause has, belatedly, become a topic around which much discussion has begun, and it was with this in mind that Sarah Atkins, Director of People and Culture at East Anglian Air Ambulance (EAAA), decided to start writing a Menopause Policy for EAAA. However, she quickly felt that this was too narrow a focus, so she decided to explore with staff the broader issues of reproductive health as a whole; this might include issues such as periods, menopause, miscarriage, terminations, fertility treatment, planned and unplanned pregnancy. The results of the surveys, discussions and other feedback were a revelation.

Staff shared a wide range of issues including:

- People unable to leave base to purchase sanitary products during a shift
- Office staff bringing in a change of clothes to combat flooding
- Partners feeling they weren't worthy of support
- Hiding symptoms of how much things were impacting work
- Questions about spaces to inject IVF drugs during the day

It seems like this was a discussion just waiting to happen. In an organisation that prides itself on having open, honest, judgement-free lines of communication, there were still areas that were clearly taboo – even for clinicians, who see and discuss the full range of humanity daily. People had been managing these difficult situations on their own and in silence. There were stories of employees bringing in full changes of identical clothes in case of flooding during periods, others who wondered how to deal with the onset of painful cramps – or the sudden need for sanitary products – in the middle of a shift, and others who had to deal with miscarriage or termination on their own and the lengths to which they went to keep it quiet.

It was interesting that one of the respondees wrote, “A paramedic nudged me on scene because I had dropped a sanitary towel out of my flight suit pocket and they were embarrassed people would see it.” No wonder, perhaps, that some staff felt that they couldn't speak up about reproductive issues.

Sarah Atkins comments:

“We started to make changes straight away. There were practical things like period boxes in toilets, hot water bottles available, desk fans, a change to dark-coloured chairs, and training for all staff to increase confidence in talking about the subject, to take it out of the shadows. We were also careful not to normalise issues that may actually need to be addressed by an employee seeing their GP – this wasn't about ensuring people turned up to, and stayed at, work at all costs. Ultimately we just wanted openness and honesty around these issues, and to make it ok to talk about them. There are still plenty of areas we want to address, such as talking more about inclusivity, language, barriers, trans colleagues, and employees' partners. But we've made a good start.”

EAAA's Dr Sarah McNeilly has been working with Sarah on the issue. She adds: *“I've been a doctor in PHEM for more than ten years and it can be quite a macho environment. It has changed a lot but it's definitely still there. Conversations like the ones we're having now are a huge step forward.”*



Dr Sarah McNeilly

One practical aspect that is being explored is uniform. Even in 2024, female staff across the country are dealing with uniforms that were not designed with the female body in mind. It is perhaps becoming a little clearer why women are significantly under-represented in clinical PHEM teams. It's time for a culture change, so the issues that affect 50% of the population – and impact 100% of the population – are in the open, discussed and addressed in line with being the progressive employers that so many air ambulance services aspire to be.



So much more than fundraising

In the dynamic world of charity fundraising, lottery canvassers stand out as unsung heroes, tirelessly spreading the message of the lifesaving impact and support for air ambulance charities nationwide. Beyond their role as fundraisers, they serve as ambassadors for the charities they represent. They are the face of the values and missions of air ambulance charities with each conversation they have and each door they knock on.

This genuine belief in the importance of their mission is what makes the work so rewarding. Rachel, Senior Team Leader for Tower Lotteries in the South East, comments, "What we do is so important to keep the services doing their incredible work, it's such a feel good job."

One of the most striking aspects of these amazing ambassadors is their ability to forge meaningful connections with the communities they serve. From bustling supermarkets to remote rural villages, they engage with people from all walks of life, fostering a sense of pride and unity in support of the lifesaving services provided by the air ambulance charities.

Davina Ellison, Head of Operations for Tower, highlighted: "One remarkable aspect of the canvassers at Tower is their longevity in the field with us. We have at least ten canvassers who have each dedicated more than a decade at the company, with the rest staying with Tower on average for over four years - which is not especially common. This speaks volumes about the rewarding nature of their work and the sense of fulfilment they get from making a difference in the lives of others."

Central to the ethos of Tower is a strict adherence to ethical fundraising practices and ensuring that they act fully in accordance with their legal and regulatory obligations: this is vital in a sector often scrutinised for its methods. These individuals prioritise transparency and integrity, ensuring that every interaction with potential donors is conducted with the utmost respect and professionalism. "Our canvassers are not just about raising funds for vital life-saving services," says Davina. "They personify the ideals of the charities they represent. When they knock on a door or talk to the public in a store, they're not just asking for money; they are sharing stories about how air ambulance charities help people in need. They want everyone to know how important these services are and how public support can make a real difference."

Caryll, one of Tower's fundraisers, explains why she loves working with the general public: "I think it's because I am a naturally inquisitive and chatty person... every day is different, every conversation is unique and interesting in its own way. I meet an amazing array of people from all walks of life and age groups who I would never otherwise have the opportunity to converse with. I like to feel I have brought a smile and pleasant moment to everyone's day. Whether they agree to support or not, I hope to make a positive and lasting impression that may encourage people to think more about the work of the air ambulances and maybe support in future."

Rachel adds: "The best part of working with the public is meeting people on a daily basis whose lives have been impacted by the air ambulance. I still get goosebumps when people tell me their stories." Carl, one of Tower's newest - but very experienced - representatives, echoes this: "It rings a bell with the public and there's always a positive response, irrespective of whether people decide to subscribe or not."

Despite all the challenges they face, the canvassers remain beacons of positivity. Their cheery smiles and optimism serve as a testament to the profound impact that individuals can have when they come together in service of the greater good.



Carl has been with Tower Lotteries for just a few months but has a strong sales background.



Rachel has been with Tower Lotteries for six years and has a strong sales background in retail. She is one of Tower's most senior and trusted representatives.



Caryll has been with Tower for over a year and has a strong market research background, a great knowledge of the sales process, and has been involved in charity lotteries for many years.

UPCOMING **EVENTS**

MAY 2024

1ST APPGAA Reception, Westminster

14TH Brake: After the Crash, Manchester

21ST APPGAA Formal Meeting, Westminster

SEPTEMBER 2024

9TH-15TH Air Ambulance Week, nationwide

12TH AAUK Golf Day, Redditch

18TH-19TH Emergency Services Show, Birmingham

23RD UK ECPR Summit 2024, London

24TH-25TH Helitech Expo, London



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