



John Della Bosca MLC
Minister for Health
Minister for the Central Coast
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

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ECMO air transfers take flight

The NSW Government has announced the new Extra-Corporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO) Medical Retrieval Service is operational two months ahead of schedule.

Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, today visited Bankstown Airport to inspect the helicopter to be used in the service.

"I congratulate the engineers and NSW Ambulance staff who worked tirelessly to modify the helicopter and gain Civil Aviation Safety Authority accreditation," the Minister said.

"The service can take flight now, well before the planned October start date.

"Since swine flu hit our shores in May, 19 road transfers have been carried out and three by fixed wing charter flights.

"This new service is part of the NSW Government's commitment to ensuring people throughout the state have access to the latest in health technology and expertise when they need it most.

Last month, the Minister announced almost a million dollars for the new service and an extra \$100,000 for aircraft modifications," the Minister said.

"Special medical teams from Royal Prince Alfred and St Vincent's Hospitals and NSW Ambulance, are transported by helicopter direct to patients anywhere in the state.

"These teams take ECMO machines to the patient and transport them to a major hospital for intensive care treatment.

"The 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 our 10 major teaching hospitals for people with heart failure prior to or following cardiac operations, or those awaiting a heart/lung transplant.

"But they are also now being used for critically ill swine flu patients suffering underlying conditions such as asthma, obesity, chronic lung disease and diabetes," the Minister said.

"The lungs of some swine flu patients cannot oxygenate their blood and these ECMO machines have been found to be effective.

"There are currently 43 ECMO machines in the NSW public hospital system, 25 are cardiac-specific and 18 are for intensive care patients with respiratory problems. Four are currently being used in the treatment of swine flu patients," the Minister added.

Contact: Paul Scott 0438 456 389