



## Angels in the Sky: Mercy Air Care

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They have been flying through Siouxland skies for thirty years... and in those three decades, [Mercy Air Care](#) has helped saved the lives of countless people in the tri-state region. Nurses are an important part of any hospital staff, but the service Mercy Air Care nurses provide to the community go above and beyond. We decided to take a look at how their roles have changed over the last 30 years.



"We all, when we were starting the program thought, 'What are we getting ourselves into?'"

Those aren't exactly the first words you'd want to hear before starting a medical helicopter program, but once Mercy Air Care lifted off from the ground in May of 1987, they never looked back.

"None of us had really done this, and we had had many weeks of intense training with physicians and ground school with the pilots and mechanics."

Teresa Worrell is one of the original flight nurses with Mercy Air Care. Prior to gaining her wings, she worked on the ER floor at Mercy Medical Center, and was excited for the opportunity to do something new and different.

"There weren't very many programs out there in that time."

In her eleven years as a flight nurse, Worrell experienced many things with Mercy Air Care. The helicopter was kept at the hospital, and the flight nurses worked on the ER floor until they received a call. Worell even recalled that Mercy Air Care played a big role after the United Flight 232 crash at Sioux Gateway Airport in July 1989. She was not scheduled to work that day, but went in to help anyway.



"I remember the drive in from Morningside, and I was at highway 75, and all the ambulances were going down the highway, and I'm thinking 'Big planes don't fly into Sioux City, and people don't survive plane crashes.' In the end how many did survive."

Still to this day, Worrell works in the ER, and has seen the program grow in her years since.

"Oh I saw it grow a lot. Every month, the number of flights we did in a month-time and the number of requests increased."

"We generally do between 350 and 400 transports per year, and that's based on an annual request volume of about 750 requests."

Mickey Sauser, the Program Director for Mercy Air Care, says the reason for an acceptance rate below 100% is due to factors like weather, prior transports, and maintenance, however he adds that the response time from a call to liftoff is only ten minutes. Over the course of three decades Mercy Air Care has performed over eleven thousand medical flights.

"Fast forward 30 years, and a lot has changed with Mercy Air Care from its location to their protocols, but one thing hasn't changed... the expectation of quality care."

Meet Charmaine Cantrell, a current flight nurse with Mercy Air Care, who has been flying for eighteen years. Before becoming a flight nurse, she also worked on the ER floor.

"From the time we began, we had very minimal protocols, so every time we would have a difficult patient or a patient would deteriorate, we'd always have to radio in for orders. Now we have protocols which are like our guidelines."

These protocols basically mean that those on the helicopter are the ones making critical medical decisions.

"In the E-R we can go right to the physician. In the helicopter, we rely on our partner for teamwork."

One other big difference between the ER and the helicopter: there are only three people inside the helicopter, excluding the patient... the pilot and two flight nurses.

It's hard to imagine having to care for a critical patient in the air... but Mercy Air Care had that covered for me. During my interview, I was invited to get a "bird's eye view" of the so-called "ICU in the sky", flying over Siouxland on a typical route to and from Sioux Gateway Airport, where the helicopter is kept and operated by Med-Trans.

"Do you have people that ever come back and personally thank you?"

"Yes we do. I picked up a little elderly lady about six months ago, and this was the second time I picked her up. She recognized me, and she calls us "Angels in the Sky".

When asked about what she missed about working on the helicopter, Worrell said she missed



the flying, but feels another part of herself is missing.

"The people and the pilots and the closeness we had with the crews."

So what's on the radar for Mercy Air Care?

Mickey Sauser says more lifesaving improvements, like stocking blood on a routine basis on the aircraft.

One thing's for sure, Mercy Air Care will continue to give high quality care to its patients for many years to come.