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## California hospital, CareJet aid Guam patients

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It has been three weeks since Guam's health-care system and the rest of the world grew a little closer, and almost a dozen patients have directly benefited so far.

Thanks to a new deal with three on-island insurance companies, about 10 patients have been flown to Cedar-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, a hospital that is routinely ranked as one of the best in the world. Also, Guam's new CareJet air ambulance flew its first patient to Honolulu last week and has scheduled an upcoming flight to Manila.

Yesterday, Dr. Spencer Koerner, Cedar-Sinai's medical director of the Center for International Health and Telemedicine, said the facility's collaboration with Guam has been seamless.

Transferred patients have been treated for a range of cancers and other complex conditions, Koerner said. Patients who are covered by SelectCare, NetCare or TakeCare can be approved for transfer.

### Advantage

Guam Medical Society president Nathaniel Berg said the advantage of Cedar-Sinai is that a patient who needs a combination of treatments -- for example, chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery -- can find all the top-of-the-line specialists they need in one place.

Both Koerner and Berg said they expected the amount of patients sent to Cedar-Sinai to climb as word of mouth spreads the hospital's reputation around the island. They also agreed that constant communication would be the key to a future of quick and quality long-distance treatment.

"Almost all of the patients have arrived with all the medical records we needed, and we've had to do our own very rarely," Koerner said. "It's been terrific."

Berg, who has been planning the cooperative effort for months, has been responsible for collecting X-rays and medical records for many of the transferred patients. He said he is glad to be a part of a collaborative effort.

"No (other hospital) has worked this closely with us on an individual basis in the past. Others have always been like 'send us the patient and we'll take care of them' but it never works out how we'd like," Berg said.

To further cooperation, Koerner and Berg have planned a teleconference in two weeks to plan an Internet X-ray sharing system. Koerner plans to visit Guam in January or February to meet more of the island's doctors and entice them to study tapes of Cedar-Sinai's operations online.

### CareJet

In addition to the transfers to Cedar-Sinai, residents have had another new option for off-island treatment recently thanks to CareJet, Guam's first non-military air ambulance.

CareJet opened for business on Oct. 25 after gaining Federal Aviation Administration certification.

Unlike Cedar-Sinai transfers, CareJet is designed to make emergency transfers to Hawaii, the Philippines and Japan.

The Westwind II twin-engine jet has since been used to take a heart attack patient to Hawaii Medical Center East for an angioplasty, a surgery that is not available on Guam.

CareJet president Terry Habeck said that the surgery is much more effective if performed within 24 hours of the attack. Without CareJet, the patient would have had to wait 10 days before a commercial flight, he said.

Although Habeck said not all flights will require a physician to ride along, Dr. George Macris aided in the inaugural flight.

Macris said he was honored to be a cog in a crucial step for Guam's health.

"The ability to rapidly transfer a patient off island can make the difference between life and death, loss of limb, paralysis," Macris said yesterday.

He added that CareJet's ability to tune cabin pressure to the specific needs of a patient could be a lifesaver.

Besides Macris, four local doctors have offered to tag along on CareJet flights -- Drs. Robert Ryan, Christopher Swanson, Jaroslav Richter and Jerone Landstrom.

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