

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE  
ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA  
**SPRING 2020**

# YOUR FLYING DOCTOR

*Fly us Further*



Royal Flying Doctor Service  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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**Cover photo:** Nanutarra, Western Australia by Pilot Simon Phelps.

**Acknowledgements:** Thank you to the patients, RFDS employees and members of our community for the photographs and stories in this publication.

## We are a charity with big responsibilities.



Demand for our service keeps growing. The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) in Western Australia has just recorded its **busiest year on record**.

We flew 25 men, women and children to safety each day on average across WA – from Esperance to Mount Magnet and Rottnest Island to Kununurra. Each patient

receives the best possible care in the fastest possible time through our determination to serve the people of Western Australia.

Our people make all the difference to our patients. We have an incredibly capable team that includes specialist doctors, flight nurses, pilots, engineers and logisticians who all work together each time we fly.

The RFDS team is dedicated to the challenge of overcoming the tyranny of distance to keep those living, working or travelling in regional WA safe across the vast expanse of the world's largest health jurisdiction.

Our busiest-ever year is a reminder we cannot rest in rising to that challenge. The RFDS will always be there with the support of generous people like you.

Best wishes

**Rebecca Tomkinson**

CEO, Royal Flying Doctor Service WA

## 2019-20: Our busiest year

It's our privilege to provide the finest care across regional WA.



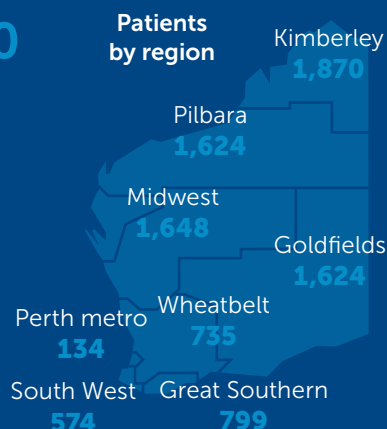
**8,000,000**  
km flown



**22,000**  
hours in the air



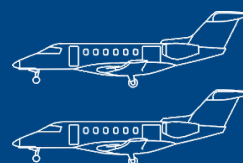
**9,012**  
patients



## Our aeromedical fleet

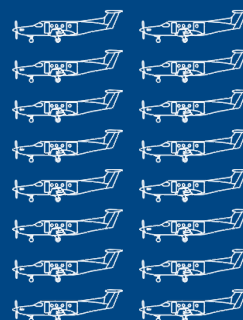
**2**

Pilatus PC-24  
Rio Tinto  
LifeFlight Jets



**16**

Pilatus PC-12  
Flying Intensive  
Care Units







## NURSING Newborns

**"The world of nursing and midwifery is limitless."**

Flight Nurse and Midwife Ashlee Blood

**T**he International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, along with a global pandemic, has thrust healthcare workers into the spotlight in 2020.

RFDS Flight Nurse Ashlee Blood says she is lucky to be in a profession with such resilient people.

"This year has highlighted the dedication and hard work every nurse and midwife invests in their jobs.

"We all love what we do – some days are challenging and others are extremely rewarding."

All RFDS Flight Nurses have critical care expertise and are qualified midwives.

Transfers relating to pregnancies, birth and newborn babies are one of the most common reasons for RFDS retrieval.

"It's a humbling experience to be there for women during such a life changing event.

"These families are experiencing such a scary time in their lives, so we have a very important role to communicate, reassure and comfort patients during flight and make it as smooth as possible for them."

Ashlee did her first transfer with the NETS (Newborn Emergency Transport Service) team earlier this year to retrieve and care for a very unwell baby from the South West.

"The baby required intensive care, so I was joined by the full NETS team which included a paediatrician and a neonatal specialist nurse.

"Our little patient required a breathing tube to be inserted. My role was to prepare the medication for the procedure – lots of double and triple checking when dealing with tiny doses of medication!

"This was a tense moment for the team, as it was a very difficult airway. The paediatrician remained calm and successfully intubated the baby.

"It was great to see the NETS team work their magic with the little baby who we were able to carefully deliver to Perth Children's Hospital.

"In those moments, I am very grateful to have a midwifery qualification and experience in the field under my belt.

"I love that in my role we are able to be there, first-hand, for our patients on the worst day of their life to help and care for them when they need us most."



This newborn baby flew from Northam to Perth on a stormy night in August 2020. Mother and baby were safely delivered to Perth Children's Hospital.

*Fly us  
Further*



**Support young families in regional WA.**

We respond to more than 10 calls for help every week for pregnant mothers and newborn babies.

Donate at: [rfdswa.com.au](http://rfdswa.com.au)

# GORGE *Rescue*

**IMAGINE** you are stranded from your injuries after a fall in a remote gorge in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

You're in immense pain and there's a bubble-like sensation in your chest which is expanding and making it hard to breathe.

For 26-year-old woman, Skrollan Hasse-Kampling, who had been hiking with friends on Dolerite Gorge one afternoon in July 2020, this was a reality. One that sparked an extraordinary night time rescue effort by the RFDS.



**R**FDS Broome Flight Nurse Heather Cudmore remembers preparing herself for the out-of-the-ordinary rescue mission with her fellow crew.

Behind the scenes, the RFDS Coordination Centre had mobilised for the rescue mission and Heather, accompanied by Dr Rory Nannery and Pilot Steve Fulton, were flying 450 kilometres north of Broome towards Mount Hart Wilderness Lodge to reach their priority one patient.

The trio would hike up Dolerite Gorge in the pitch black of night with only head torches lighting the way. Preparation and focus were key.

Landing on a flare-lit remote airstrip at dusk, they were greeted by the lodge's manager Brad Leahy who gave them an appraisal of the terrain and an update on Skrollan's condition.

Fortunately for Skrollan, two nurses holidaying at the lodge cared for her at the accident site while awaiting the Flying Doctor.

With nightfall rapidly setting in, a team of 14 men and women made their way towards Skrollan.

What transpired next is a story of resilience, a tale that encapsulates the spirit of the RFDS and the people living in remote WA.

Traveller Daniel Hoh and a group of other hikers who stayed with Skrollan were concerned about the severity of the situation.

Some had raced to the lodge to raise the alarm when the accident happened, having no phone service on the gorge.

A pale-faced Skrollan had been sitting, bent forward, to assist her breathing for nearly six hours.

The bubble sensation in her chest meant she was unable to lie down and fatigue was setting in.

Tucked deep inside Dolerite Gorge over unsteady boulders, slippery jagged rocks and shallow pools,

Daniel knew navigating Skrollan out of the gorge would be difficult.

"Once the RFDS arrived, the atmosphere instantly shifted to problem-solving. Rory, the doctor, and the team were friendly, calm and collected and they had a plan which relieved everyone's nerves," said Daniel.

**"We suddenly saw the lights coming from around the corner. That was a really, really good feeling," Skrollan said.**



After being assessed and given pain relief, the RFDS crew recruited the helpers to form a human chain to support and lead Skrollan out of the gorge on foot.

"Everyone made such a great effort. Some of them went ahead to see which was the best path to take and I always had someone left and right of me supporting my weight," said Skrollan.

"They even used their hands to push my feet against the rocks to give me support.

"I don't think I could've made it out of the gorge without them. The RFDS are my guardian angels, my saviours."

The rescue mission took around five hours and Skrollan was flown to Broome Hospital, arriving just after midnight.

Flight Nurse Heather said the nature of the mission epitomised what it's like to live in the Kimberley.

"The retrieval was an amazing team effort by everyone. It was done in true Kimberley fashion – they supported us and we supported them."

Skrollan was flown to Perth by the RFDS the following day for further treatment and was eventually repatriated back to the Kimberley on a third RFDS flight with Flight Nurse Heather.



Skrollan during her rescue, safe in the RFDS aircraft; Skrollan returning to Broome after treatment in Perth with one of her 'guardian angels' Flight Nurse Heather Cudmore.

*Fly us Further*



### Give when you go!

The RFDS is a free service. Donate when you travel.

Recent calls for help for holiday-related incidents include camping, vehicle, motorbike, helicopter and jet ski accidents, snake bites and even two injuries from whales.

Donate at: [rfdswa.com.au](http://rfdswa.com.au)





# WANDER

## out yonder

Travel tips  
from our crews  
#wanderoutyonder

 READ MORE

### Simon Phelps

PILOT, RFDS, PORT HEDLAND

The Pilbara is an amazing part of Australia and well worth a visit.

Visiting Karijini National Park is a must! It is WA's version of the Grand Canyon – on a smaller scale.

Port Hedland is the hub of the Pilbara and a great place to base yourself. It is the world's largest export port and is well known for the dazzling salt piles, mining facilities and cargo ships docked at the harbour.

- A** Fern Pool, Karijini National Park
- B** Salt pile, Port Hedland

### Bryn James

PILOT, RFDS, BROOME

A hidden gem in the Wunaamin Miliwundi Ranges is Bell Gorge along the Gibb River Road. You can easily spend a day swimming and taking in the scenic lookout.

For an adventure, Tunnel Creek is an epic walk where you'll see awesome rock formations and maybe even a freshwater crocodile! Take a torch!

It is a real privilege to see the Kimberley from the RFDS cockpit.

- C** Camping amongst boabs near Tunnel Creek
- D** Bryn at Bell Gorge

### Dr Steve Hill

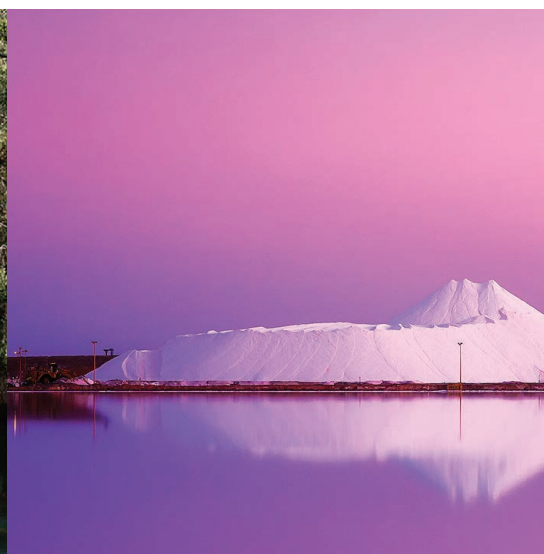
DENTIST, RFDS, JANDAKOT

I've served as a dentist with the Flying Doctor for nearly 5 ½ years now.

Our patients are located in the remote communities of Warburton, Wiluna, in the Kimberley and Midwest. Through my work, I've been blessed to encounter some of the most breathtaking and untouched landscapes.

Some of my favourite landscapes include the view from Elephant Rock in Kununurra, the Bungle Bungles and Mount Talbot near Warburton (permit required!).

- E** Steve at the world heritage listed Bungle Bungle Range in Purnululu National Park
- F** View from Elephant Rock near Kununurra







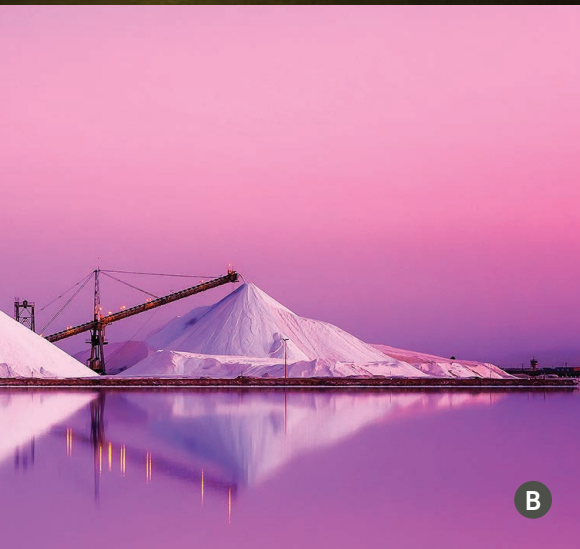
E



D



C



B

## Top 10 Travel Safe Tips

We know the wonders and pitfalls of remote travel. Here are our top tips for safe travel from the Flying Doctor when you #wanderoutyonder.

- 1 Share your itinerary.** Let others know where you are travelling and when you expect to return (also a great excuse to brag about your trip!) Check in with them along the way.
- 2 Pack plenty!** Take more than enough water, food, fuel, first aid supplies and appropriate clothing.
- 3 Take enough medication.** Carry adequate supplies of your usual medications, as pharmacies can be few and far between. If necessary, carry a GP health summary with your medical history and a copy of a recent ECG if you have a history of heart problems.
- 4 Talk to the locals.** Do your research and check in with the locals to make sure you are well informed about current conditions.
- 5 Avoid driving at night or dusk** as visibility is low and wildlife aplenty.
- 6 Know your location.** Use an app or GPS to provide your exact coordinates so help can reach you fast in an emergency.
- 7 Know first aid.** Learn CPR and how to treat a snake bite, cuts and fractures until expert care arrives.
- 8 Carry a mobile phone** and keep it charged.
- 9 Be croc wise, be ocean wise.** Our rugged coastlines and waterways can be treacherous, so enjoy them safely. Be aware the Kimberley and Pilbara regions are crocodile country.
- 10 Take us with you.** Keep the Flying Doctor emergency number on hand in case you need us: **1800 625 800**. We are here when you need us the most. We are a free service but as a charity, we welcome your donation to keep us flying.



# Face shield

Protective Isolation Mask

Instructions for use  
protective film on the  
of all lenses. In order  
prevent scratching  
please remove the  
film before use. Thank

face shield  
liquid splashing





# COVID-19

## *A new normal*



**S**ince the outbreak of COVID-19, the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) in Western Australia has transported 102 suspected and three confirmed COVID-19 cases.

RFDS senior staff specialist Dr Andrew Thelander said one of the service's biggest challenges was to develop new COVID-19 clinical and infection control protocols with very limited time.

The changes made so swiftly to RFDS' operations are expected to be here to stay.

"We had to overhaul our operations and procedures from start to finish. It was a coordinated response of epic proportions," Dr Thelander said.

Treating patients in a small aircraft is a challenging environment, with clinicians boosting infection control protocols.

The specialised frontline workforce across five RFDS bases in WA has been trained to care for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 to protect everyone's safety.

Crews wear PPE including masks, goggles, gowns and gloves with stringent step-by-step procedures. Aircraft and equipment are thoroughly decontaminated following each transfer.

On the ground, the RFDS quickly expanded its workforce capacity by 25 per cent in anticipation of potential surges in demand while also managing disruptions caused by COVID-19. Staff took on extra hours and cancelled leave plans to assist.

"We were all united and resolved to keep everyone safe, both patients and staff. For me, it is the embodiment of the Australian spirit."

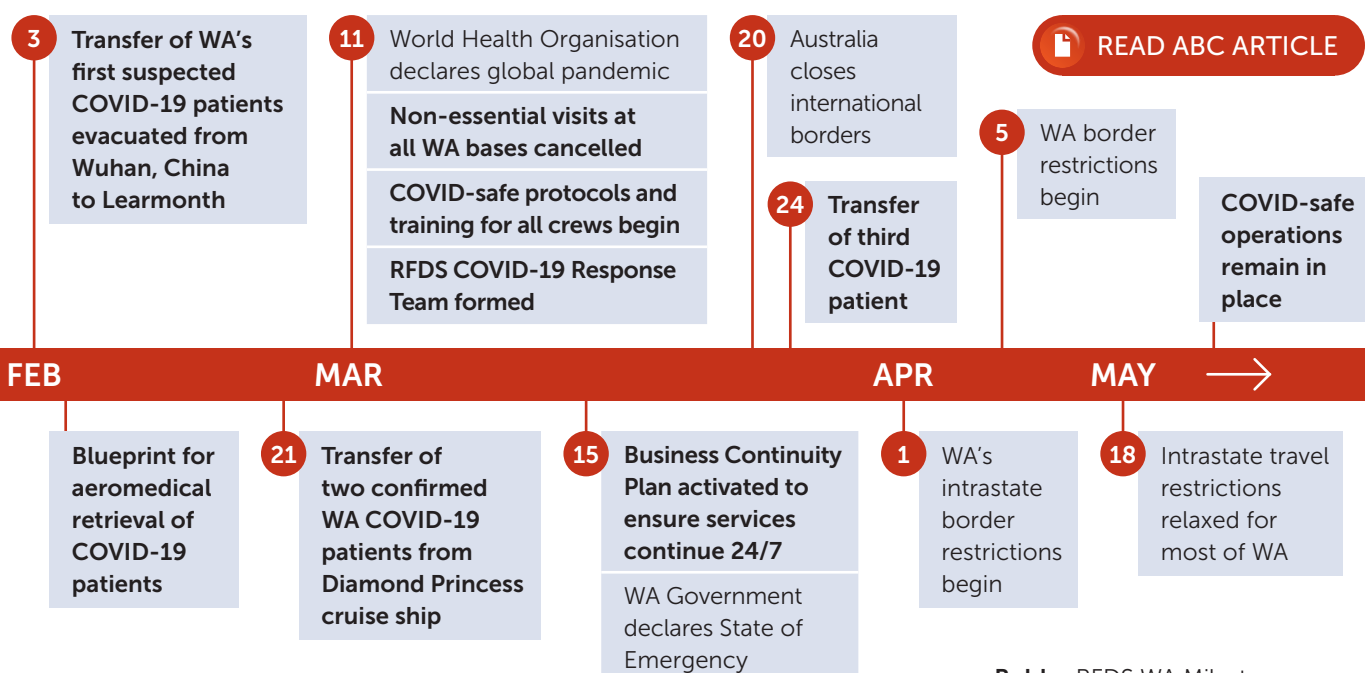
**"When you go through something like this, you understand what camaraderie is," Dr Thelander said.**

An essential link in the health and emergency services network, the RFDS provided extra assistance by transporting essential health workers, equipment, supplies and pathology samples across WA during lockdown.

Crews also helicoptered onto ships anchored offshore in North West harbours to conduct COVID-19 swab testing for seafarers.

The RFDS continues to guard against complacency, remaining response ready for Western Australia.

## COVID-19 Timeline



**Bold** = RFDS WA Milestones

## Coordination Centre

The 24/7 Coordination Centre at Jandakot takes 50,000 calls a year. The centre tasks all crews across WA according to patient priority. Logisticians and doctors assess the best response in each situation, taking into account the condition and urgency of each patient, airstrip availability and conditions, fuelling, weather, aircraft availability and other factors.

On-call doctors assess patients remotely and liaise with regional hospitals, remote nursing posts, emergency services, mine sites and station owners as needed to prepare for each patient retrieval.

The Coordination Centre communicates with crews in-flight by VHF radio and satellite phone to keep track of every step of the journey.



View our live flight map here:  
[www.flyingdoctor.org.au/map/](http://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/map/)

# Preparing for TAKE-O



## Engineers

Highly specialised avionic and airframe engineers, technical record keepers, maintenance planners and logistics experts keep the RFDS flying safely and maintain 18 aircraft to ensure they are airworthy. They manage every part on every aircraft, including medical equipment.

RFDS engineers are specialists for the Pilatus aircraft, including the Rio Tinto LifeFlight PC-24 jets which are the first of their type in the world.



## Pilots

RFDS pilots rarely know where they will be flying or landing on any given day. Flight plans change frequently – even mid-flight. The highly skilled pilots can land on roads or dirt airstrips of all kinds, sometimes calling on locals to light the airstrip with vehicle headlights for night landings.

Before take-off, pilots develop flight plans, do pre-flight aircraft inspections and ensure all safety checks are complete. They liaise with the Coordination Centre to match flying options with patient needs, weather conditions and airstrip availability.

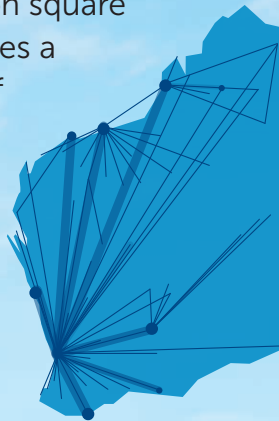
Once prepared, pilots advise medical crews it's time to board. The pilot helps to load patients and aeromedical equipment.

After a final call to the Coordination Centre to advise their ETA at the receiving location, it's time for take-off.

## What it takes to get a crew in the air

FF Sending doctors and nurses into the skies at a moment's notice to reach patients spread across more than 2.5 million square kilometres takes a special kind of something.

Average weekly flight map



## Medical and Nursing crews

All flight nurses are qualified midwives and RFDS doctors specialise in emergency medicine which can include trauma, intensive care, emergency care, anaesthetics, neonatal care and obstetrics.

Working in a 'flying intensive care unit' is a dynamic space. Medical and nursing crews are highly trained to respond with little outside assistance to time-critical emergencies.

Before each flight, the medical team must decide what they will need for each patient. Blood supplies stored in the RFDS' own blood bank, anti-venom, specialist equipment and medicines are some of the items they may carry.

RFDS doctors and flight nurses are trained in cabin safety and undergo ongoing training to suit their unique working conditions.

They are exactly who you want by your side on what might be the worst day of your life.





# ROBIN MILLER

## *A life of service and adventure*

**R**obin's achievements during her short lifetime were remarkable. As a pioneering female pilot who combined her passion for flying with nursing, Robin made extraordinary contributions to both aviation and medicine.

Robin is best known as the 'Sugarbird Lady'. When a second wave of polio hit Western Australia in the late 1960s, Robin began an immunisation program, flying to isolated communities to deliver vaccine doses on a sugar cube. Although the Sabin vaccine had been available for a decade, the tyranny of distance in WA had prevented immunisations for those living far from town.

Robin borrowed money to purchase an aircraft especially

for this purpose, then worked as both pilot and nurse to deliver the immunisation program on the ground.

She worked with the Royal Flying Doctor Service in the 1960s and 70s. As well as working as a 'flying nurse', she delivered several new RFDS aircraft to WA, making epic voyages from Europe and the USA, including a solo journey from Paris to Perth.

Robin was born in Perth in 1940 to two well-known Western Australians, author and historian Dame Mary Durack and Captain Horrie Miller, a pioneering aviator and co-founder of MacRobertson Miller Airways.

Robin passed away in December 1975 aged 35 and was laid to rest in Broome.

Her legacy lives on in the health programs that continue to be delivered by the RFDS in remote WA communities.

*Fly us  
Further*



**Bequests to RFDS are an extraordinary gift to the people of regional Western Australia.**

Learn more about joining The Robin Miller Society at [flyingdoctor.org.au/wa](http://flyingdoctor.org.au/wa)

Donate at: [rfdswa.com.au](http://rfdswa.com.au)



# Introducing The Robin Miller Society

The Royal Flying Doctor Service Western Australia is proud to announce the launch of The Robin Miller Society to acknowledge and steward generous donors who have left us a bequest in their Will.

The Robin Miller Society is establishing a community of like-minded individuals who share a common wish to leave a positive legacy for regional Western Australia and a commitment to the RFDS in WA.

Members of the Society enjoy an ongoing connection to the extraordinary work of the RFDS and to each other.



The Sugarbird Lady made 450 visits to remote towns and communities and flew more than 43,000 miles (69,200 kms) to administer 37,000 polio vaccines.

More information about The Robin Miller Society and the RFDS Bequest Program are available:

- ▶ Contact RFDS Philanthropy Manager, Mr Matthew Correia, for a confidential conversation by telephone on (08) 9417 6375 or email [matthew.correia@rfdswa.com.au](mailto:matthew.correia@rfdswa.com.au)
- ▶ Visit our website [flyingdoctor.org.au/wa/support-us-wa](http://flyingdoctor.org.au/wa/support-us-wa)

## My sister Robin

Marie Megaw remembers tagging along on clinic runs in the Kimberley and flying on occasional missions with her older sister Robin Miller at the tender age of 16.

A makeshift clinic would be set up under a tree in a remote Aboriginal community and residents would gather around to receive the vaccine for the polio disease. Robin would also address their other ailments.

"Robin was quite determined to do something with her life to help others. She would get up at 4am to get organised for a clinic and often worked overtime," said Marie.

"Much like COVID-19 today, Robin would worry that polio would get into these communities - which would have been disastrous.

"Robin devoted her life to helping and caring for people. The RFDS meant the world to her, where she was able to combine her medical knowledge and love for flying.

"It's important to know the trials and tribulations people went through in the past so we can learn from them.

"It's extraordinary that Robin achieved so much in such a short lifetime. People up north still remember her. They'll never forget."



Robin Miller (left) with her parents Dame Mary Durack and Captain Horrie Miller and sisters including Marie Megaw (seated child).



# HOLIDAY *Emergency*

A woman flown to Perth after suffering a mild stroke while visiting Monkey Mia says the response from the Royal Flying Doctor Service was crucial to her receiving emergency hospital treatment.

Ellen was enjoying a holiday with her husband when the emergency occurred, triggering an urgent response from the manager of their accommodation, the local nursing post at Denham and the RFDS.

An RFDS aircraft and crew met Ellen at the Denham nursing post where she received an initial assessment and treatment before being flown to Perth.

Ellen says she was thankful for the help she received at such an overwhelming time.

"This was something I never expected I would experience. I feel so grateful these people came out in the dead of night to get me on a plane and get me to hospital. I'm grateful for the kindness of everybody on that journey."

Dr Rob Radici, RFDS Head of Medical says, "Getting to specialist care as soon as possible is absolutely critical for stroke patients. If they receive treatment quickly, their chances of making a recovery are greatly improved."

Ellen spent 10 days in Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and has since recovered full strength in her arm and leg affected by the stroke.



**"I think the RFDS provides a crucial service for people in remote areas."**

*Fly us  
Further*



**Help the RFDS get emergency care to patients quickly.**

Heart and cardiovascular emergencies (including strokes and heart attacks) are the most common reason the RFDS is called for help.

Donate at: [rfdswa.com.au](http://rfdswa.com.au)

## 2019-20 Patient Data

### Most common reasons the RFDS is called for help



**1 Injuries** (e.g. vehicle and work accidents, fractures, lacerations, snake bites)



**4 Unknown signs and symptoms requiring investigation**



**2 Circulatory** (e.g. heart attack, stroke)



**5 Respiratory** (e.g. pneumonia, COVID-19)



**3 Digestive** (e.g. ulcers, hernia)



**6 Pregnancy, childbirth and newborns**



# How *you* can support your Flying Doctor today

## DONATE

- ▶ Make a secure donation online at [rfdswa.com.au](http://rfdswa.com.au)
- ▶ Donate by telephone (08) 9417 6400
- ▶ Complete and return the RFDS donation slip

**"The RFDS will always be there with the support of amazing people like you."**

RFDS WA CEO Rebecca Tomkinson



**Stay in touch:**

Subscribe to 'The Flyer' to receive the latest Flying Doctor WA news to your inbox by emailing [communications@rfdswa.com.au](mailto:communications@rfdswa.com.au)

## Other ways to join our crew and support our work

Contact the RFDS WA at [giving@rfdswa.com.au](mailto:giving@rfdswa.com.au) or (08) 9417 6400

### Give through your work

Workplace Giving Program or corporate support

### Make a bequest and join the Robin Miller Society

### Join our Support Crew of regular givers

Give thoughtful Christmas gifts with RFDS merchandise available at [www.rfdswa.com.au](http://www.rfdswa.com.au)



**\$19:** 2021 RFDS Australia A4 calendar

**\$12:** 10 RFDS Christmas cards (5 designs)





Royal Flying Doctor Service  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## *Acknowledgement of Country*

The Royal Flying Doctor Service in Western Australia respects and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians and our vision for reconciliation is to provide an organisational culture that strives for unity, equity and respect.

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