



## LifeNet 2-3 closes its base in Clarinda

Tuesday, May 19, 2020 at 4:35 pm

As of Tuesday, May 19, the local LifeNet 2-3 base at the Clarinda Regional Health Center is no longer maintained through Air Methods.

"The loss of the Clarinda based helicopter is a tremendous loss for not only us in Montgomery County but all of us in Southwest Iowa," commented Montgomery County Emergency Management Director Brian Hamman. "While we will continue to be served by other LifeNet helicopters, it's disappointing and will unfortunately put a heavy burden on our EMS providers, healthcare facilities and patients who are in need of a rapid and critical transport. Depending on availability and flight times of the other helicopters, our EMS providers are going to have to face some tough decisions of whether to stop at the closest hospital for additional patient care or proceed by ground to quickly get a patient to a trauma center or other advanced care facility in times of need."

LifeNet Air Medical Services are owned and operated by Air Methods. Air Methods Director of Communications and Government Affairs, Doug Flanders said the decision to close the Page County base was made "after a thorough review and analysis of its operations."

The cost of this around-the-clock readiness averages nearly \$3 million per year for each air base, according to an Association of Air Medical Services (AAMS) cost study. Eighty-five percent of that cost is associated with operating an air base, which gives companies little leeway in the reduction of costs, explained Flanders.

He added reimbursement for services has not kept up with costs. "Medicare, which covers air medical services in emergency cases only, established the current air medical service payment rates in 2002 based on an estimated 1998 cost pool. Today, the average Medicare per-transport reimbursement covers approximately half of the cost per transport, according to the AAMS study."

In Iowa, Flanders said more than 70 percent of their transports are Medicaid, Medicare, and self-pay/uninsured, which combined reimburses less than 30 percent of overall costs. Medicaid in Iowa pays \$250 per patient transport, plus mileage, with Medicare covering around \$6,000.

"Lower payments by government payers in general means each Iowa air ambulance patient with private health insurance has to cover the costs for the remaining balance left by these 70 percent of transports. This business environment is not sustainable and puts emergency air medical transport access at risk, which is critical in a rural state like Iowa," Flanders said.

Headquartered in Greenwood Village, Colorado, Flanders added Air Methods will continue to cover southwest Iowa through Unity Point in Carroll, LifeNet 1-1 based in Omaha and LifeNet 2-2 based in St. Joseph, Missouri.

The Clarinda Regional Health Center LifeNet base was opened in 2012 and served a 40 mile radius in southwest Iowa. There were approximately 12 employees at the base. Flanders said they were provided opportunities with Air Methods to relocate.

"We all have a tremendous professional relationship with the crew members both on scene and providing exceptional training and feedback and that will all be greatly missed and most likely won't occur to the frequency it has in the past," Hamman said.