

# Mercy flight's precision planning saves newborn's life

A mercy flight, covering 15,935 kilometres across the airspace of 10 countries into war-torn Yemen, has saved the life of a month-old baby.



## Medical evacuation from a war zone

One-month-old, Yazan Yousif Qade, was in dire need of surgery for a congenital heart defect, but to get to the doctors who could treat him, a team of South African medical aviation evacuation specialists had to find a way to safely fly him and his mother from his conflict-ravaged homeland of Yemen.

“We were approached by Alliance International Medical Services (AIMS) to take on this medical evacuation, and despite the difficult and dangerous situation, Netcare 911 and its medical aviation partner, Medair, felt compelled to help as it was made clear to us that we were Yazan’s last hope,” recalls Bruce Johnstone, chief executive of Medair.

## Two-fold safety plan

The logistical aspect of the flight was twofold. Firstly, to negotiate safe passage through the airspace of several conflict zones, and, secondly, to ensure the wellbeing of the patient and medical staff involved.

“As the patient was so young and had such compromised health, it was necessary for him to be monitored closely

throughout the flight from Yemen to Johannesburg. While Netcare 911 is well placed to undertake mercy flights of this nature, this was clearly a mission with a difference that required meticulous planning and logistical support at every level. The safety and wellbeing of our staff, who needed to monitor the critically ill Yazan during the long flight, were of paramount importance throughout this operation,” says Netcare 911 chief operating officer, Craig Grindell.

This case was further complicated by the fact that permission had to be sought from the Saudi Arabian authorities to cross their airspace, and we then had to wait for them to give us safe timeslots for the flights. We were fully cognisant of the political sensitivities that needed to be negotiated for us to conduct a mercy flight in that part of the world. The South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation provided considerable assistance in this regard,” Johnstone notes.

## **Life-saving surgery**

“The return trip went smoothly from a medical perspective, and the air ambulance landed at Lanseria International Airport just after 5am on Friday, 12 February. The baby was transported directly to Netcare Sunninghill Hospital for the heart surgery he so urgently needed,” reports Grindell.

Yazan, who suffered coarctation of the aorta, which is the narrowing of the large blood vessel branching from the heart, underwent an emergency procedure that very afternoon. The procedure, performed by cardiothoracic surgeons, Dr Hendrik Mamorare and Dr Izak de Villiers Jonker, and paediatric cardiologist, Dr Raymond Dansky, was a success. Yazan, recovered well, and returned home to Yemen in early March.

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