

**November 10, 2003**

## **The Royal Flying Doctor Service**

**The world's largest aero-medical service  
and Australia's second largest airline  
celebrates its founder's birthday**

The Royal Flying Doctor Service has become one of the great iconic images of the Australian Outback. But for around 10,000 Victorians each year, the RFDS's legendary 'mantle of safety' becomes a reality when medical emergencies occur as they're holidaying or working in remote parts of Australia.

According to David Zerman, CEO of the RFDS in Victoria, most of these emergencies can be resolved through telephone advice from medical staff, or through authorised use of one of the 3500 medical chests that are kept in locations that may be 500km from the nearest town.

But for about 1000 Victorians who may have been involved in a car smash, an industrial accident or even gone into premature labour, aerial evacuation to a hospital by the RFDS may save their life.

The RFDS's 44 aircraft, many of which are the Swiss-built Pilatus PC12, are fitted out in Australia as airborne emergency units, with two intensive care stretchers managed by highly trained medical staff who must have experience in an intensive care or emergency department of a hospital.

"We carried out just over 30,000 medical evacuations in Australia last year (an average of 82 per day) and our planes flew more than 14 million kilometres," Mr Zerman says.

"In total, more than 212,000 patients (an average of 580 per day) were treated through the RFDS's emergency services, health care clinics, radio and phone consultations, medical chests and inter-hospital transfers."

The RFDS is the world's oldest and biggest aero-medical service, with a fleet size that makes it Australia's second largest airline. It provides its services free of charge, meaning that every year it must find \$110 million to cover operational costs. About 70 to 75 per cent of this figure is met by government, but the RFDS also needs to raise more than \$20 million a year through donations.

Victorians have proven to be strong supporters, with 27,000 making donations in the last two or three years. The RFDS is currently mounting its John Flynn Day fundraising campaign in Victoria, with 150 volunteers processing the mail-out to current donors.

“Victorians have really taken the RFDS to heart, and last year helped us enormously by contributing nearly \$3 million in donations,” Mr Zerman says.

“We also estimate that our volunteers save us up to \$500,000 each year by processing our mail outs.”

Although it’s not seen in Victorian skies, the RFDS has a strong connection to this state. It was founded in 1928 by the Very Reverend John Flynn, who was born in the Central Victorian goldfields town of Moliagal and who now appears on Australia’s \$20 note.

Flynn was acting on a suggestion made by another Victorian, Lieutenant Clifford Peel, an aviator on his way to France to fight in WW1. The Victorian connection continues today through Peel’s nephew, also Clifford Peel, who is an active RFDS volunteer in Victoria.

The RFDS treated just 225 patients and saved four lives in its first year, but it now has medical contact with 581 people every day. Over its 75 year history, the Service has treated more than four million patients. It has 21 bases around Australia and employs 95 pilots, 115 flight nurses and more than 75 doctors.

Donations to the RFDS are tax deductible, and may be sent to the RFDS at 60 St Kilda Road, St Kilda, Victoria 3182. Tickets are also available for the John Flynn Day Luncheon at the Regent Ballroom on Tuesday November 25, at which three RFDS staff from Western Australia will talk about their challenging life with the world’s largest aero-medical service. Tickets cost \$75 each and can be booked on 03 9521 2633.