

## The Mental Game: Are You Playing to Win?

*By Jeff White, M.S., MTSP-C, FP-C  
Director of Safety, HealthNet Aeromedical Services*

In the recent months, we've seen the full gambit of risk in our industry. On December 27, 2021, a medical fixed wing aircraft crashed in a residential area of San Diego, California, killing all four people on board. Just a few weeks later, a medical helicopter crashed in a busy area outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. While the medical team walked away unharmed with their infant patient, the pilot suffered serious injuries.

Every day when we arrive at work, a tragic event lies in a very small, dark spot in the back of our minds. We try not to think about it or discuss it in length. We practice emergency procedures and we do survival training. Some are even completing incapacitated pilot training. As a safety professional you hope medical crews, pilots and mechanics are all physically and mentally prepared for an event. No amount of policy or procedure can help them in an actual event. It takes their dedication to the craft.

I am proud to work in an industry that focuses so much time and attention on the "what ifs" of the job. With that said, what are you doing as an individual? Are you practicing those techniques to the point you are not just getting them right, but you cannot get them wrong? Do you plan for events while flying so if one occurs you are mentally ready for the tasks at hand? If you are a ground crew, do you complete your transport risk assessments as required or do you just "check a box"? Have you looked at the weather in the area you are transporting to and formulated your backup plan? Do you know of any accidents or construction?

This is also a profession that takes work and dedication even when you are not on duty. A large part of mental health is general health. Are you fueling your bodies with the right nutrition? Are you getting enough rest and quality sleep to maintain mental alertness? Are you managing any injuries or illness that are affecting you?

Keeping yourself prepared will assist in successful outcomes in the end. We hope that there will not be events like the ones described above. Preparation is key to a successful outcome. ■

### THIS ISSUE INCLUDES:

- The Twisted Reality of Exhaustion
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- Winter Helipad Safety Tips



**Mission. Ready.**

# The Twisted Reality of Exhaustion

*By Shannon L. Gollnick, MSM, NRP  
Vice-President of EMS, MedCare Ambulance*

There is no doubt that the elongated timeline of the current pandemic and the most recent surge has taken its toll on the American healthcare system.

We see the news headlines every day about staffing shortages, bed availability, patient surges, etc. These are realities that we live and have lived – day, after day, after day. The toll of this exhaustion is evident in our own staffing numbers. It's evident in the interactions with hospital staff. It's evident in our interactions with each other. Everyone is tired. Everyone is exhausted. Everyone is irritable. The author Rosamond Rice is quoted as saying "The worst thing about being tired is the negative twist of perception." This statement cannot ring more true in recent weeks. Exhaustion alters our perception of the world to such a negative degree, that it is difficult not to assume this perception is indeed our reality. That everything is negative. That the world is falling apart. That our choice to enter and remain in healthcare is a poor one.

Many of you may question, "What are we doing? Why are we doing this?" You are not alone. The time has come to remind ourselves that perception is not always reality. Our perception is a choice. Exhaustion is treatable. Our need to take care of each other has never been greater.

The physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion we all face can trigger a cascade of negativity that can not only alter our perception of reality, but also lead us down a very dark path. In the coming days, please take the time to take care of yourself. Take the time to check in with your brothers and sisters next to you on the squad, in the station, and at the facilities. Take the time to step away from the chaos and ensure that your mental and emotional health is prioritized. We cannot provide compassionate care from an empty container and we cannot take care of others if we don't first take care of ourselves. ■

# You're Safe, I'm Safe

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Things to ponder in these cold winter days: What does safety mean to you? Is it something that you acknowledge occasionally? Is it only important at work, or is it part of your daily life?

We have classes on water safety, driving safety, hazardous materials safety, vehicle safety, and so much more. With so many practices for safe operations here at work, I suggest we also go a bit further where safety begins at home.

We leave our homes in our personal vehicles, which you have (hopefully) determined is safe to drive. We follow posted speed limits, avoid distracted driving, and always wear our seatbelts. We do these things because we value anything that helps us be safe, drive safe, and arrive safely to our worksite.

Let's discuss some safety items that are simple to accomplish but have potential for a big impact on the health, safety, and wellbeing of crew members.

- Come to work well rested
- In anticipation of an oncoming crew, the current crew should ensure walkways, parking lots, helipads and ambulance parking areas are free of ice and snow.
- Wipe down high touch surface areas
- Be certain to dress appropriately for cold weather. Under layers should be moisture wicking material (silk, wool, cotton). Avoid any synthetic materials
- Carry extra gloves and have an appropriate head covering.
- I have on my person my own survival pack and includes hand warmer packs (yes, I will share)
- ALWAYS bring or wear a coat, I know this sounds silly but from experience I can say I have gone on a flight and left my coat at the base.
- Add extra blankets to the cots
- Stay hydrated even in the cold weather and don't allow yourself to become "hangry"
- If you see something that's not quite right, say something. The worst thing you can do is say nothing. Safety truly does begin with each of us.

Winter comes with its own inherent hazards and safety concerns. It's cold, windy, icy, and snowy (that's why I retired!). Be aware of and plan for contingencies that could affect not only your own safety but the safety of your team as well. Remember, safety begins at home. Be prepared and don't be left out in the cold. To each of you: Safe travels by ground or air and keep each other safe. Spring is a flicker on the horizon! ■



## Winter Helipad Safety Tips

- For melting snow & ice, use only UREA or products that are noncorrosive & nonhazardous to the environment.
- DO NOT use rock salt or sand on helipads
- Clear warning & safety signs of snow
- Clear perimeter lighting of snow
- Be aware that whiteout conditions can occur during takeoff & landings, which can impact pedestrian & vehicle traffic.
- Position snow piles so that melting snow & ice will drain away from helipad to prevent refreezing.

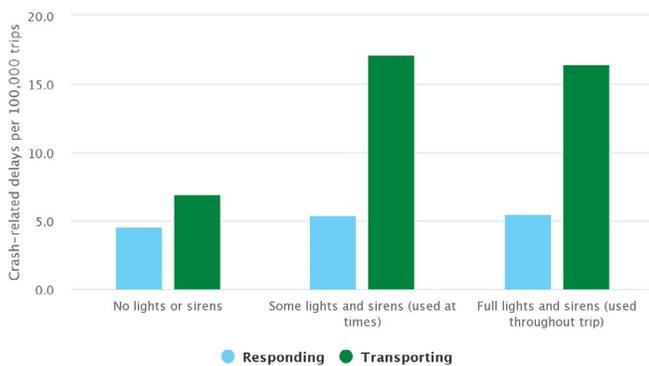


# Crash Risk of Light and Siren Use

Lynn Gilmore, CSP  
Safety Officer, MedFlight/MedCare Ambulance

According to the National Safety Council, a recent study analyzed the crash risk when lights and sirens are utilized by 911 ambulance services. This data also compares the risk during the initial response and during the actual transport. The peak risk was shown during transports when some lights and sirens were used with a crash rate of 17.6 per 100,000 trips.

Crash-related delays by light and siren use among ambulance 911 scene responses and subsequent transports



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**Source:** Watanabe, B.L., Patterson, G.S., Kempema, J.M, Magallanes, O., & Brown, L.H. (2019). Is use of warning lights and sirens associated with increased risk of ambulance crashes? A contemporary analysis using national EMS information system (NEMIS) data. *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, 74(1). ■

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# SafetyMatters

Do you have any ideas for SafetyMatters?  
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