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Tuesday May 22, 2007

Air Methods to handle helicopter duties Emergency group still located at Robert Packer

By [Brian Liberatore](#)
Press & Sun-Bulletin

SAYRE, Pa. -- Four years after expanding its emergency helicopter service in the Northeast and Pennsylvania, STAT MedEvac is pulling out of Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre.

Air Methods, a Denver-based air ambulance provider, plans to take over the operation June 1. The switch will not disrupt service, said hospital and Air Methods officials. MedEvac was one of two air ambulances that served Greater Binghamton.

"It's going to be the same," said Marty Delaney, local program director for Air Methods. "The same level of service they had in the past, the same airframe, the same crew. They'll just be wearing different color suits and a operating a differen-color aircraft."

MedEvac notified hospital officials earlier this year that they would not renew their contract, said Kathy Lewis, director of public relations for Guthrie Healthcare Systems, which runs Robert Packer Hospital, about 45 miles southwest of Binghamton. MedEvac had replaced the Guthrie One helicopter in 2003 after Guthrie Healthcare Systems deemed the program too costly.

Lewis said Guthrie, had a "positive relationship" with MedEvac. "It was a business decision," she said of MedEvac's departure.

MedEvac officials did not immediately return requests for comment.

MedEvac is an air ambulance controlled by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. The nonprofit company operates air ambulances primarily out of Pennsylvania, with a few bases in Ohio, New Jersey, Maryland and West Virginia. STAT pulled a helicopter from North Dansville, near Rochester, in November, seven months after setting up business.

Some see the switch from STAT MedEvac to Air Methods as a boon to local coverage.

"If anything there would be an improvement," said Gary Morgan, operations manager for Mercy Flight, which runs emergency helicopters out of Canandaigua and Syracuse. "Anytime you put a new service in, there's going to be an improvement, at least in the short term. Given Air Methods' reputation, I think it could be a long-term improvement."

The staff that operates the MedEvac helicopter will be offered positions under Air Methods, Delaney said. The helicopter operates with a staff of three -- a pilot, a nurse and a paramedic -- who are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. With MedEvac, the crew responded to 500 calls annually, typically within a 70-mile radius of Sayre. The coverage area will not change.

Air Methods has 168 bases in 38 states, with 220 helicopters. Unlike STAT MedEvac, Air Methods is a for-profit corporation. Guthrie Healthcare officials did not reveal specifics of the contracts with MedEvac or with Air Methods.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



The STAT MedEvac helicopter, which provides emergency services from Robert Packer Hospital in Sayre, Pa., arrives at a mock DWI accident staged at Union-Endicott High School on Friday. Air Methods will be taking over STAT MedEvac duties in June.

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