Nursing on the move – specialist nursing for patients requiring repatriation and retrieval

RCN guidance
Acknowledgements

This Royal College of Nursing (RCN) guidance has been developed and written by the RCN Critical Care and In-Flight Nursing Forum Steering Committee:

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Special thanks to Victoria De Nato of the Special Ambulance Transfer Service (SATS) for her input on the road transportation of patients of all age groups.

Evaluation

A formal review and update of this document is planned for the end of 2015. We are interested in your feedback which can be sent to the RCN Critical Care and In-Flight Nursing Forum via the RCN website (see below). We would be specifically interested in the relevance of this publication to your practice, the development of your service and ideas for the next review.

RCN forum websites

RCN Critical Care and In-Flight Nursing Forum and RCN Defence Nursing Forum can be found at: www.rcn.org.uk/communities

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Introduction

It is thought that as many as 50,000 patient movements occur by air each year in Europe (CFMU, 2011). Most air transfers will also include a movement by road to get to an aircraft or return to a hospital. Increasing centralisation of specialist services in the UK has resulted in the development of retrieval teams, particularly in paediatrics and neonatology where most transfers are undertaken by road. It remains to be seen if the future development of centralised specialisations will further increase the need for intra-hospital transfers. Furthermore, the military continues to move patients from the point of wounding, injury or disease to Deployed Health Care (DHC) facilities. Other methods include intra-theatre movements from the operational environments to patients’ host nation facilities. Patient transportation within the UK, as well as into and out of the UK, is now a significant area of patient care provision.

Specialist training in repatriation and retrieval nursing is currently limited and yet should be mandatory for nurses working in this extremely complex and challenging field. This RCN guidance sets out the role and specifications for nurses who specialise in transport nursing. The guidance also outlines recommendations about educational preparation and reinforces the role nurses have at the forefront of patient transportation, especially in the context of increasing centralisation of care and worldwide travel. This field of practice highlights the changing nature of health care provision.

This guidance is designed for use by nurses, managers and commissioners in developing either their individual role or developing a new or existing service and identifying needs within commissioning.
Areas of practice

The illnesses and injuries sustained by patients requiring repatriation and retrieval cover all nursing and midwifery specialties, and so, the transport nursing role may encompass all adult, paediatric, neonatal, mental health and obstetric specialties. Nursing staff are therefore drawn from across all nursing and midwifery primary qualifications and secondary specialties.

Repatriation and retrieval nurses are employed across four main areas of practice within the NHS, within the MOD and in the commercial sector. Each has significant differences which need to be addressed (areas of sub-specialty), although each will have considerable areas of overlap.

1. Commercial flight nursing.
2. Air ambulance nursing.
3. Retrieval nursing.

Commercial flight nursing

Commercial flight (CF) nursing refers to the provision of nursing care pre-, in- and post-flight for patients transported using scheduled commercial airlines.

• Pre-flight requires a detailed assessment of a patient’s progression through their illness/injury while overseas. The assessment covers the treatments offered, the quality of health care provision and arranging the complex logistics of transporting the patient by scheduled aircraft.
• In-flight is caring for a patient at altitude in a non-hospital environment where non-medical passengers are also being carried.
• Post-flight is providing care during the onward ground transfer to a final destination.

Air ambulance nursing

Air ambulance (AA) nursing refers to the provision of nursing care pre-, in- and post-flight for patients being transported using specialised aircraft for (usually) an individual patient. AA in this context refers to fixed-wing air ambulances rather than the rotary version, for example helicopter emergency medical services (HEMS) or search and rescue services (SARS) which are usually staffed by specialist paramedics. (For information: Although addressed in the military section, emergency nurses are on the RAF Medical Emergency Response Teams (MERT) in Afghanistan). This area may have significant areas of overlap with retrieval nursing.

• Pre-flight requires providing a detailed assessment of a patient’s reported condition while in the UK or abroad, assessing the AA’s ability to safely carry the patient and allocating appropriate staff.
• In-flight is caring for a patient at altitude in a very small non-hospital environment.
• Post-flight is providing care during the onward ground transfer to a final destination.

Retrieval nursing

Retrieval nursing refers to teams mobilised through a referral system to stabilise a patient, prepare them for transportation and to return the patient to their source hospital or to the receiving facility. This may require the use of an AA, CF or even SARS, but is mostly undertaken by road. It therefore has significant areas of overlap with CF and AA.

• Pre-retrieval requires undertaking a detailed assessment of a patient’s needs in order to offer advice and management planning while still in the referring centre, along with the logistical planning for provision of a retrieval team, a bed at the receiving facility, and the most appropriate and safe mode of transport.
• In-retrieval requires caring for a patient in a very small non-hospital environment.
• Post-retrieval requires providing a detailed hand over of care and management needs to the receiving centre. Providing outreach education on stabilisation and management of the acutely ill or injured patient to referring facilities.
Military nursing

Within military medical practice the term MEDEVAC encompasses the spectrum of capabilities in the evacuation of patients when accompanied by a medical specialist. This includes the movement of patients from point of wounding, injury or disease to deployed health care (DHC) facilities, intra-theatre movements and strategic movement from the operational location to patients’ host nation facilities (Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 4-03). Within the context of repatriation and retrieval nursing, nurses from the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force are likely to be involved in the movement of patients dependant on their role, training and operational need. Transfers are likely to be conducted in a variety of challenging and hostile environments.

Role development

Stages of development also need to be considered when progressing along a career pathway. There are three levels to support role development, staffing and remuneration decisions:

1. specialist nurse
2. clinical nurse specialist
3. consultant nurse/advanced nurse practitioner.

A repatriation and retrieval nurse will continue to develop general expertise and may incorporate advanced practice skills such as prescribing, to supplement the specialist nursing role. Higher levels build on the qualifications specified for the first level specialist nurse.
Career pathway

Repatriation and retrieval specialist nurse

Agenda for Change band 6 or equivalent.
Starts at advanced beginner (in the specialty) and becomes proficient.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional qualifications</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Registered nurse or midwife.</td>
<td>Recent training based upon the Advanced Life Support Group (ALSG) Safe Transfer and Retrieval course principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teaching/assessing qualification.</td>
<td>Immediate Life Support (ILS)/Advanced Life Support (ALS) or paediatric equivalent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• First degree or working towards one.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Specialist repatriation and retrieval nursing qualification or working towards one.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Experience                   | Minimum of two years’ post-registration experience caring for patients in an acute environment. | Recent experience of working in the repatriation and retrieval environment. |
|                             | • Proven management experience (ward level or equivalent). |                                                                            |
|                             | • Proven interest in teaching and counselling. |                                                                            |

| Skills                       | Excellent communication skills. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Teaching and presentation skills. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Ability to work in collaboration with other professionals/teams. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Knowledge of standards setting, audit and research. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Good IT skills. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Team resource management capabilities. |                                                                            |

Repatriation and retrieval clinical nurse specialist

Agenda for Change band 7 or equivalent.
Starts proficient and becomes expert.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional qualifications</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has, or is, working towards a master’s degree encompassing an element of repatriation and retrieval nursing relevant to the sub-specialist practice environment.</td>
<td>Non-medical prescribing course or working towards one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced clinical assessment of the adult/child (either as a standalone module or as part of a degree).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Experience                   | Minimum of three years’ experience in repatriation and retrieval nursing, including at least three years as a repatriation and retrieval specialist nurse. |                                                                            |

| Skills                       | Involvement in research and audit. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Clinical leadership and knowledge. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Excellent time management. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Logistical organisation capabilities. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Proven teaching and presentation skills. |                                                                            |
|                             | • Proven team resource management capabilities. |                                                                            |
Repatriation and retrieval consultant/advanced nurse practitioner (ANP)

Agenda for Change band 8a or b, or equivalent.

Expert.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional qualifications</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Desirable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master’s degree encompassing an element of repatriation and retrieval nursing relevant to the sub-specialist practice environment.</td>
<td>Experience as a repatriation and retrieval specialist nurse at a highly specialised level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May be working towards or considering a PhD.</td>
<td>• Examples of innovative ways of working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advanced clinical assessment of the adult/child (for ANP).</td>
<td>• Experience of the complexities of logistics and planning for transporting patients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Non-medical prescribing qualification (for ANP).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Minimum of three years’ experience as repatriation and retrieval clinical nurse specialist.</td>
<td>Experience as a repatriation and retrieval specialist nurse at a highly specialised level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Able to demonstrate extensive experience of caring for patients in the repatriation and retrieval environment.</td>
<td>• Examples of innovative ways of working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Able to demonstrate knowledge of more uncommon conditions which require transportation.</td>
<td>• Experience of the complexities of logistics and planning for transporting patients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Able to demonstrate teaching experience at diploma level and above.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Able to demonstrate participation in research and audit.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Significant experience of planning transfers for patients.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Confidence and competence to independently assess, plan and implement the care of an adult or child that requires inter-facility transport.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Proven teaching and presentation skills at diploma level and above.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proven research skills and knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Extensive clinical leadership and knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Excellent team resource management capabilities.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All registered nurses and midwives will require suitable professional indemnity insurance relevant to this field of practice and be both clinically current and capable of providing expert care for the needs of their patient.
Role descriptors

Repatriation and retrieval specialist nurse

Repatriation and retrieval specialist nurses establish a holistic approach to the care of patients requiring transportation by a non-dedicated aircraft, such as a commercial flight, dedicated aircraft such as an air ambulance and/or by ground transportation. The specialist nurses co-ordinate care, in conjunction with other members of the flight and land transport team, for patients requiring transport and their families. This includes assessing, developing, implementing and evaluating programmes of care and providing specialist clinical advice to all involved in the logistical and clinical aspects of transportation. Such nurses use clinical judgement and autonomous decision making relating to repatriation and retrieval nursing care and management of patients. Following an assessment of a patient’s needs and preferences, they then undertake the required clinical actions using specialist knowledge within the transport setting.

Responsibilities

Specialist repatriation and retrieval care management

- Assess, plan, implement and evaluate holistic transport specialist nursing care pre-, intra- and post-transfer, anticipating effects of environment and stressors on patients and families, utilising information from a variety of sources.
- Evaluate ongoing patient assessment requirements intra-transfer.
- Act as a source of specialist advice for other professionals and agencies, patients and families relating to the nursing care and management of patients during transfer/repatriation, including the management of acute complications at altitude and, or, in an isolated environment.

Specialist psychological/psychosocial/physical and clinical interventions

- Provide counselling, support and reassurance to patients and families pre-, intra- and post-transfer.
- Provide information about the risks associated with patient transportation, perform baseline assessments, including evaluation of medical records available and formulate clinical management plans.
- Instigate treatment based on a patient assessment according to standard operating procedures and be able to adjust care according to need.

Practice and service development

- Contribute to policy, standards and development of repatriation and retrieval care delivery strategies.
- Implement and evaluate repatriation and retrieval innovations across the whole operation area of their organisation.

Teaching and education

- Provide individual specialist teaching for other professionals, patients and families, facilitating the development of care skills and knowledge relating to the transportation of patients.

Professional, ethical and legal practice

- Act as a source of specialist advice for staff on repatriation and retrieval nursing care and the management of patients at altitude and/or in an isolated environment.
- Act in a manner which supports Care Quality Commission outcomes in relation to the regulated activities of their employing organisation.
- Act in a manner which safeguards and protects both vulnerable adults and children.

Development of self and others

- Maintain own professional development, including regular training in areas relevant to patient transportation and related specialties.
- Support the development of skills and knowledge amongst less experienced, junior members of the team.
Leadership
• Act as a role model for junior members of staff and non-specialists.

Research and evidence-based practice
• Identify opportunities for clinical audit and research, promoting a culture of research awareness within the repatriation and retrieval specialty.

Communication
• Maintain effective communication with patients and families to give information about repatriation and retrieval patient transportation to enable informed choices.
• Establish and maintain effective communication with members of the clinical team, the flight team and ground operations.
• Ensure a safe and detailed handover to the receiving team and participate in outcome evaluation.

Working with other professionals/agencies
• Liaise with members of the referring organisations (assistance companies, insurance underwriters, airlines and ground transportation, NHS and MOD) to provide co-ordinated packages of care.
• Establish advocacy around financial and clinical aspects of care.

Knowledge and information management
• Interpret and analyse information from a variety of sources to underpin decision making.
• Maintain accurate and legible clinical and legal documents.
• Maintain confidentiality pre-, intra- and post-repatriation and retrieval whilst ensuring appropriate documentation is provided to relevant parties.

Health, safety and security
• Promote best practice in health, safety and security in self and others in the area of repatriation and retrieval specialist practice.
• Maintain a culture of safety by ensuring risk is identified and incidents reported.

Equality, diversity and rights
• Enable others to exercise their rights and promote equality and diversity.

Repatriation and retrieval clinical nurse specialist

In conjunction with other members of the multi-disciplinary repatriation and retrieval team, clinical nurse specialists enable the development of organisation-wide services, which enhance the quality and safety of care for patients and their families when requiring repatriation and retrieval. The clinical nurse specialist will identify needs and facilitate the implementation of services, whilst setting standards for care. They use clinical judgement and autonomous decision making about repatriation and retrieval specialist nursing care and management of patients. They undertake a range of specialist clinical actions across a variety of patient conditions and age groups, following assessment of each patient’s needs and preferences. As well as the responsibilities of a repatriation and retrieval nurse (see page 9), a clinical nurse specialist supports the development of organisation-wide services for patients, their families and other professionals with additional responsibilities listed below.

Specialist repatriation and retrieval care management
• Lead and develop specific repatriation and retrieval specialist education and training programmes for professionals, patients and families relating to the care and management of patients during transportation. Facilitating the development of high quality repatriation and retrieval-related specialist care pre-, intra- and post-transfer through advanced clinical assessment.
• Lead the assessment of multiple patient transfer and complex repatriations.
• Provide mentorship within the organisation to repatriation and retrieval specialist nurses through all levels of care.

Specialist psychological/psycho-social/physical and clinical interventions
• Develop and evaluate counselling strategies and support for patients and families pre-, intra- and post-repatriation and retrieval transfer.

Practice and service development (including quality)
• Formulate policy, standards and specialist repatriation and retrieval care delivery strategies and standard operating procedures.
• Lead the implementation and evaluation of repatriation and retrieval care innovations across the organisation in order to meet national and international standards.
• Identify needs and facilitate the implementation of services.
• Work closely across all patient referring and accepting agencies to establish and maintain best practice for transition from and into hospital services.

**Teaching and education**
• Lead and develop specific repatriation and retrieval specialist education programmes for nursing and other professionals across all referring and accepting agencies, as well as patients, their families and the wider community.

**Professional, ethical and legal practice**
• Act as a prime source of authority for specialist advice for staff on specialist nursing care and management of patients requiring repatriation and retrieval by air or road.
• Ensure professional practice is maintained in accordance with *The Code. Standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives* (NMC, 2008) and manage concerns as necessary.

**Development of self and others**
• Enhance the development of skills and knowledge of team members, providing clinical supervision for junior team members.

**Leadership**
• Lead and manage personnel, services and resources, facilitating teamwork through the identification of a shared vision.

**Research and evidence-based practice**
• Initiate nursing research, clinical audit and development programmes.
• Write for publication on issues within professional repatriation and retrieval practice and encourage junior team members to share best practice examples.

**Communication**
• Develop and initiate strategies to effectively communicate key messages and information about patient transport issues across all professional disciplines, thereby enabling informed choices. This will include outcome evaluation and debriefs.

**Health, safety and security**
• Monitor the health and safety of specialist air ambulance nurses, ensuring appropriate support and guidance is available.
• Develop strategies to monitor, report and reduce risk within the air ambulance environment.

**Equality, diversity and rights**
• Lead and implement practices, policies and strategies which enable others to exercise their rights, thereby promoting equality, diversity and cultural sensitivities.

**Repatriation and retrieval consultant/advanced nurse practitioner**

Nurse consultants provide the highest level of expert nursing practice for repatriation and retrieval transportation, acting autonomously and with authority. They use advanced knowledge and skills to shape and implement high quality services across their organisation and beyond. With the same responsibilities as repatriation and retrieval nurses, and repatriation and retrieval clinical nurse specialists, repatriation and retrieval nurse consultants also provide additional expertise across professional groups and with national or international responsibilities as listed here.

**Responsibilities**

**Specialist repatriation and retrieval care management**
• Provide expert advice and assessment of a caseload of referrals for acceptance for repatriation and retrieval using the most appropriate transport.
• To act as a lead clinician within the transport team across both air and ground transportation. Acting with autonomy and responsibility for both own practice and those of the team.

**Practice and service development (including quality)**
• Act as a catalyst for change, challenging professional and organisational boundaries, generating new solutions which will best meet the needs of other professionals, patients and families in a manner which shows sensitivity to challenges and resources.
• Lead the implementation and evaluation of repatriation and retrieval care innovations across the industry to meet national and international standards.
• Be actively involved in professional networks for the improvement of repatriation and retrieval services.
• Demonstrate budget management skills that promote safe practice within the limitations laid down by service commissioners, and influence change if goals are unrealistic.

Health, safety and security
• Lead/co-lead on the evaluation of safety and risk reduction, formulating policy and practice to promote the culture of safety.
• Ensure the practices within the specialty of repatriation and retrieval are in accordance with the services governance structure and benchmarked against recognised standards of excellence.

Teaching and education
• Proactively identify educational needs across the field, leading and developing multidisciplinary training and development, lobbying for resources as necessary.
• Work in partnership with education providers to ensure that continuing professional development provision meets needs, participating in the development of new courses as required.

Leadership
• Contribute to policy-making at organisation, national and international levels.
• Develop care pathways in a clinical framework that reflects national and international standards.

Research and evidence-based practice
• Undertake research projects in conjunction with other professionals and education providers.
• Participate in the formation of research bids and clinical audit activities.
• Facilitate multidisciplinary and cross-sector clinical audit activities.

Communication
• Facilitate communication with teams, other organisations and networks by attending suitable local, national and international repatriation and retrieval and related specialty events, organising events when appropriate, disseminating information gained and writing for publication.
References and further reading

Central Flow Management Unit (CFMU). Hospital status flights recorded within, into or out of Europe, 2011. For more information on CFMU go to: www.eurocontrol.int/network-operations


Notes