

# LEARNING WITH LIFEFLIGHT

**Educational programs play a crucial role in LifeFlight of Maine's ability to train the crew and our efforts to improve the skills of EMS providers across the entire system.** The curriculum includes reviewing actual patient experiences, online and classroom instruction, and simulation training. These trainings incorporate the most current treatments, tools, and skills required to care for Maine's most critically ill. Whether onboarding LifeFlight orientees, continuing to develop the skills of longtime LifeFlight crewmembers, or beginning a relationship with a new clinician who is years away from joining the organization, our education and training efforts are at the very core of our ability to care for the people of Maine.

As the state's entire healthcare system continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, LifeFlight is increasingly called to assist with additional advanced critical care training for smaller community hospital staff. Patient bed availability and management continue to be a serious issue across the state. As a result, community hospitals are keeping critical patients longer than expected, requiring local staff to care for patients who would usually be transferred to a major medical center. Rural hospitals in Washington and Penobscot counties have made requests to LifeFlight for advanced critical care and ventilator training so they can continue to care for these critically ill patients safely.



**Steve Babin joined LifeFlight in the fall of 2021 as the Senior Clinical Educator** and is leading the development of both the internal education program and statewide outreach programs. Steve was one of LifeFlight's original flight nurses and rejoined the organization after teaching and developing simulation programs at Husson University. He then created the simulation program for Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center's clinical education department.

Working closely with Director of Clinical Operations Chuck Hogan, Steve manages and provides strategic insight for the LifeFlight education program, ensuring our team's knowledge and best practice competence that is required to care for our critically ill and injured patients.

The LifeFlight crew's expanded scope of practice necessitates a far greater level of training than other types of clinical positions. Due to the unique complexity of the patient care that LifeFlight provides, the training scenarios that the orientees experience will often be the first time they are facing that particular intervention or challenge. Since LifeFlight medical crews typically include one nurse and one paramedic, every member of the team trains diligently to maximize the effectiveness and safety of the patient care they can provide through the close partnership model. This relationship also requires both partners to collectively and correctly apply critical thinking skills as part of a fast-moving decision-making process.

**The nature of providing critical care in a 30 ft<sup>2</sup> space, while flying 160 knots at an elevation of 1,500 feet, presents a unique set of challenges.** In addition to medical training, our clinical staff also receive extensive aviation training, giving them the skills to remain safe while flying or on the ground. To maximize the speed of our aircraft, the crews operate in a very small cabin forcing them to use the space and resources at hand as efficiently as possible. While these skills and comfort in an aircraft environment eventually come more naturally, there is a period of adaptation for a clinician used to a hospital or even a ground ambulance.

LifeFlight medical crew members have various backgrounds, but many come to the organization from EMS care in busy 911 systems or from critical care units at larger medical centers. Most of the crew transfer from other positions and providers within the state, but some move to Maine for the opportunity to work at LifeFlight. New crew members join LifeFlight for an orientation that typically lasts six to eight months, depending on the background and skills that each orientee possesses. Orientation is divided into three phases, focusing on assessment, equipment, and finally, the ability to work independently with a partner. Orientees pass through the phases after completing the required objectives and a simulated intervention.



*Paramedic Brent Melvin, and nurses Tom Gutow, Nate Barrett, and Andrew Hughes conduct a simulation training in the Bangor Savings Bank Simulation and Learning Lab.*

One of the key components of LifeFlight's internal and external education program is simulation. The LifeFlight Foundation received a generous gift from the Bangor Savings Bank Foundation to create simulation labs at each of the three bases in Bangor, Lewiston, and Sanford; construction is nearly complete on these state-of-the-art facilities. Patient headwalls—compressors that simulate oxygen and medical airflow—and vital signs monitors were the last key pieces to be installed in the labs to create a real-life emergency room setting. The simulation recording platform captures live video, audio, and vital sign monitor data so medical providers and proctors can debrief a simulation and conduct a real-time review of how various interventions affect patient care. The completion of the labs ensures that nurses and paramedics from LifeFlight and across Maine can engage in a realistic and immersive patient care experience, similar to what they will encounter in a helicopter, hospital, or other EMS setting. A grand opening for the Bangor Savings Bank Simulation and Learning Labs is tentatively planned for spring 2022.

In November 2021, LifeFlight held its latest Critical Care Academy (CCA). Twelve participants, including six LifeFlight orientees and six external participants, completed 19 days of academy training at several locations throughout Maine. The CCA continues to be a valuable method of identifying future LifeFlight crew members while educating our partners in EMS around the state. This Academy would not have been possible without the collaboration from partners, including staff at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center, Central Maine Medical Center, Maine Medical Center, Mid Coast Hospital, Augusta Fire Department, Gorham Public Safety, Brunswick Fire Department, Rockland Fire Department, and Central Lincoln County EMS. Academy topics included various disease processes, treatment modalities, specialty populations (pediatrics, neonatal, and high-risk obstetrics), and operational aspects of critical care transport. Initial plans for another Critical Care Academy with our Aroostook County partners are underway for the spring of 2022.

## LifeFlight Crew At A Glance

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| <b>24</b> Nurses     | <b>14</b> Helicopter Pilots               |
| <b>24</b> Paramedics | <b>8</b> Airplane Pilots                  |
| <b>7</b> CommSpecs   | <b>8</b> Aviation Maintenance Technicians |

**38% of LifeFlight aviation and clinical crew have served in one of the branches of the military.**

**LifeFlight is just one link in the chain of survival and remains committed to partnering with first responders, paramedics, emergency room nurses and physicians, and specialists at regional healthcare centers as we continue to navigate the current health crisis.**