ONBOARD MEDICAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES

When embarking on a cruise, the last thing our guests want to think about is the need for medical attention. However, our guests can be assured that if a medical situation should arise they would be in excellent hands, as Holland America Line is committed to providing the highest quality onboard medical care for ship guests and crewmembers and providing excellent first response and emergency care to passengers until they can be transferred to a shoreside medical facility.

Every cruise is staffed with one passenger physician and medical officers—2 to 4 registered nurses and one crew physician—available for emergencies 24 hours a day. Acknowledged as an industry leader in cruise medicine, Holland America Line carefully screens applicants for shipboard medical staff positions: passenger physicians and nurses must be American- or Canadian-trained and licensed and experienced in emergency medicine. Nurses must have a minimum of four years of recent active nursing experience in emergency or critical care; crew physicians are trained and board-certified in the Phillipines. All staff are certified in advanced cardiac life support.

Each Holland America Line ship has a medical center carrying much of the standard equipment found in North American hospital emergency departments. While not a full-service hospital, the onboard medical center accommodates most emergencies and routine medical procedures. The medical center has an examination room, capabilities to perform simple laboratory tests, an X-ray machine, one isolation bed, an intensive care unit with one bed, and one or two additional beds. A pacemaker, defibrillator, cardiac monitor, electrocardiogram machine, ventilator, oxygen and suction unit are included in the medical center’s mini-intensive care unit.

Every Holland America Line ship is equipped with three automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) placed in strategic locations on the ship to allow for quick response. In addition to the medical professionals on board, Holland America Line officers and staff who work closely with guests receive annual CPR and AED training. The dining and bar staff also receives training in the Heimlich Maneuver to manage any choking incidents.

In 1995, Holland America Line was the first cruise line to add thrombolytic treatment to its on-board medical services. Thrombolytic therapy is an anti-clotting medical treatment that prevents permanent heart damage and promotes fast recovery by dissolving arterial blood clots, the leading cause of heart attacks. The therapy is available for emergency treatment of heart attack patients, who are carefully screened to determine the advisability of its use.

In Fall 2000, the ms Amsterdam was the first HAL ship to be equipped with live interactive Telemedicine which provides “dial-up” medical consulting possibilities as well as teleradiology. The ship is able to access any medical specialist through the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. Radiologists can provide an instant over read of any X-rays done on board. All ships introduced after the ms Amsterdam have digital radiology.
In keeping with the most updated technology available, Holland America and Windstar vessels now have Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). These handheld electronic data managers are equipped with numerous medical information programs that are updated monthly. These programs track the most up-to-date information available on medications and treatment guidelines. Having access to the internet, together with the PDAs, gives the ships multiple current medical resources.

In most instances, medical staff can support, comfort and care for patients who suddenly become ill on board. They are generally able to diagnose the illness and recommend a course of treatment, possibly prescribing medications from the ship's pharmacy. The medical centers are not suitable for surgery. Due to the limited medical facilities on the ships, the company will not accept reservations for women who will be 24 or more weeks pregnant by the last day of their cruise.

If a patient is in critical condition, the doctor and nurses work to stabilize the patient’s condition until transfer to a full-service hospital is arranged. Holland America Line has procedures for emergency disembarks by ground ambulance; via Coast Guard helicopter if medically appropriate and logistically possible in relation to the ship’s distance from land; and also for fixed-wing air ambulance transfers. These protocols are in place on each ship and are coordinated through Fleet Medical Operations at HAL’s corporate headquarters in Seattle. All departments on board work together as a team in the event of a medical evacuation emergency. A structured emergency response team on board each ship runs monthly practice drills.

The company’s medical director (consultant), Dr. Carter Hill, is a diplomate of the National Board of Medical Examiners, the American Board of Internal Medicine and the American Board of Emergency Medicine. Dr. Hill has more than 20 years of experience in treating infectious diseases and in supervising emergency care and advanced cardiac support services. A currently practicing emergency physician, Dr. Hill is always available to the ships and their medical staff for consultation.

Sally van Boheemen, RN, is Director of Holland America Line’s Fleet Medical Operations and has over 23 years of emergency nursing experience. She manages the in-house staff of seven as well as approximately 750 sailing medical personnel. She oversees all aspects of the ships’ medical operations, including budget, hiring, training, passenger emergencies and inventory of equipment and medicines.

The on-board medical center maintains regular hours daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. The medical officers respond to on-board emergencies 24 hours a day.

All consultation fees and charges are paid by the guest on his or her onboard account through Holland America’s convenient “cashless” system. Since most health plans, including Medicare, do not cover the costs of medical care at sea and in foreign ports, guests are encouraged to obtain supplemental health and emergency evacuation insurance prior to travel.

Although a well-stocked pharmacy is available onboard to treat most conditions, guests are advised to bring their own prescription medications with them, in carry-on luggage. Guests with ongoing medical conditions should bring along a copy of their medical records to assist in diagnosis and treatment. Since ship-to-shore consultations may be necessary, bringing the telephone number of the guest’s personal physician is encouraged.
Oxygen is available on board for emergencies only. Regular oxygen users should arrange for their own oxygen and advise Holland America Line through their travel agent. When oxygen is used, a “No Smoking — Oxygen in Use” sign will be posted on the stateroom door for safety purposes.

A limited number of complimentary wheelchairs are available by advance arrangement through Holland America Line’s Ship Services Department at 1-800-541-1576.

Special meals such as low-sodium, low-cholesterol, low-fat, vegetarian and diabetic, are available when dietary requests are made in advance through guests’ travel agents.

Holland America Line frequently accommodates groups of up to 30 individuals with special medical needs, such as cardiac, dialysis or respiratory patients. Additionally, Holland America Line ships are suitable for physically-challenged guests. For further assistance, guests with special medical requirements may ask their travel agent to fax information to Holland America Line’s Ship Services Dept.: (206) 298-3014.