

Podcast 20 – The Royal Flying Doctor Service

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 20 – The Royal Flying Doctor Service

Hi,

Even though Australia is a big place with lots of open spaces, 89% of its 23 million people live in the big cities or in towns nearby, mostly on the coast. For those people, getting to a doctor or a hospital is usually no problem. But what about people who live in remote locations? In these places, there are no hospitals and a doctor may not visit very often, or not at all. What about people who work at remote cattle stations, or remote mining towns in the outback, or in small towns many hundreds of kilometres from the nearest hospital? These people get sick and have accidents too. And what about people who are travelling in these remote areas? Sometimes they will need urgent medical help while they are travelling. To meet these health needs, Australia has a unique organization. It's called the Royal Flying Doctor Service, or RFDS for short.

The RFDS was started 85 years ago by the Reverend John Flynn. On the 17th of May, 1928 he was able to organise the first aircraft flight carrying a pilot and the first RFDS doctor to help someone in a remote area. In 1929, the pedal powered radio was invented so that people in remote outback Australia could call the RFDS by radio in a medical emergency. Today the RFDS provides medical transport across 80% of outback Australia, providing medical help for all those people living in remote areas and also those travelling through outback

Australia. Radio is still used to communicate in many outback locations today although the telephone is now readily available. John Flynn's picture is on Australia's \$20 note. He was certainly a great Australian.

The RFDS today is a large organization with 61 aircraft which, in 2011/12, made over 74,000 flights covering a distance of nearly 27 million kilometres. It employs 1,150 staff including 186 pilots, 19 radio staff, 162 doctors and 247 nurses. It has 21 bases around Australia with aircraft which also provide medical services, and 5 special health facilities which provide just medical services. It provides services 24 hours a day to an area of Australia that's nearly the size of the USA. Every day, it makes around 200 landings. Wow, that's big. Without it, life in outback Australia would be almost impossible.



In 2011/12, it cost nearly \$60 million to run. These costs come from Australian governments (72%), charity donations (17%) and the rest from other sources of income. Importantly, for the people that it helps every day across Australia, there is no cost. It is free.

The RFDS helps people in a number of ways, and not only by aircraft transport. I'll summarise their services next. For a complete list and more details about the RFDS, you should visit the RFDS website, at <http://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/>.

Emergency Air Transport

When someone is seriously ill or injured and requires urgent transport by air to a hospital, the RFDS will send an aircraft. For this service, the RFDS may fly to an isolated place such as a cattle station, a mine site, a road house or a small town, to a remote health facility, or even to where the accident has happened.



The RFDS will also transfer sick patients by air from one hospital to a larger hospital if required.

All RFDS aircraft are specially set up as small intensive care units, with state-of-the-art medical equipment.



They are capable of speeds of up to 500 kilometres per hour and can travel for up to 1,500 kilometres. They are pressurised, which means the air pressure inside the aircraft is the same as at sea level. This is essential for the treatment of serious injuries.

Aircraft are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Aircraft are staffed with a pilot, a flight nurse and sometimes also a doctor. In 2011/12, there were almost 5,000 emergency evacuations.

Telehealth Consultations

Sometimes, a doctor can treat a sick person by talking to them on the phone and then prescribing medicine. This method of remote consultations is used by RFDS doctors very successfully. It is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week by telephone and radio to people living or travelling in rural and outback Australia. Over 85,000 of these consultations are conducted each year. That's a lot of

patients who were helped without anyone having to travel hundreds of kilometres.

Doctors and Nurses – They Come to the People

Many times however, it's best if the doctor or nurse goes to the patient. The RFDS meets this need by sending doctors to remote areas regularly to hold clinics. A clinic is like a temporary doctor's practice which the people can visit to be treated for sicknesses which are not urgent. The RFDS doctor flies in, holds the clinic and then flies out. In 2011/12, there were around 3,000 such clinics and RFDS doctors treated more than 31,000 patients at these clinics. There are also special child and maternal clinics for the care of pregnant women, babies and young children. This means having a family in a remote area can be a safer experience. These clinics are run by RFDS doctors and specialist child and maternal health nurses.

Nurses also provide clinics. As well as providing everyday health care to patients, they also spend several days in each place providing health education, including school health programs, immunization and screening programs in remote schools. In 2011/12, there were around 1,600 nursing clinics and they treated more than 10,000 patients at those clinics.

Medical Chests

The RFDS also provides medical chests at certain locations around Australia. A medical chest is a large metal box containing a range of medicines, bandages and other medical items used to treat sick or injured people. It's a bit like a chemist shop in a box. They are looked after by a member of the public who must manage it according to RFDS rules. Currently, there are 2,431 medical chests in rural and remote Australia.

Rural Women's GP Service

One special RFDS program is called the Rural Women's GP Service. It provides RFDS women doctors for remote communities, to deal with more sensitive women's health issues. Many rural women would prefer to see a female doctor about these issues. This service encourages them to visit the doctor when a clinic is held.

Health Promotion

A major part of what the RFDS does is about promoting healthy living. There is a saying – prevention is better than cure. So all RFDS programs and services also promote good health practices. That way, even if you are healthy today, you can learn how to prevent illness in the future.

For those of you who are interested in flying, here are some details about the aircraft the RFDS uses.

- They have PC-12 Pilatus aircraft, which are single engine propeller aircraft. These carry a single pilot, 1 nurse and room for 2 patients. These are used for emergency air transport.
- They also have Beecraft King Air B200 aircraft, which are twin engine propeller aircraft. These can carry two pilots, 1 nurse, sometimes a doctor and have room for 2 patients. These are also used for emergency air transport.
- The third aircraft is a single Hawker 800XP2, a twin engine Jet, carrying 3 medical staff and with room for 3 patients.
- There are also 2 Cessna Grand Caravan C208 aircraft. These are single engine propeller aircraft.



I have never had to fly in an RFDS aircraft and I hope it stays that way. In the meantime, those Australians living in rural and remote Australia can enjoy living in the outback, knowing that if they become sick or are injured, the RFDS is always there.

Check out this short video on the RFDS.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it by clicking the comments link at the top of this story. You can leave your comment in English or in any language and I will translate it. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. Perhaps you could suggest a topic for a future podcast. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

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PODCAST 20 QUIZ

Start

1 / 10

True or False? - If you get sick or have an accident in an outback location in Australia where there is no doctor or hospital, then it's hopeless.

True

False

Prev

Next

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True or False? - Today, the Royal Flying Doctor Service provides medical help to 80% of outback Australia.

True

False

Prev

Next

3 / 10

True or False? - People are able to call the RFDS on radio or by phone from outback areas, in order to request help.

True

False

Prev

Next

4 / 10

True or False? - The RFDS employs pilots, radio operators and will soon also employ nurses.

True

False

Prev

Next

5 / 10

True or False? - When people use the RFDS, they must pay a fee.

True

False

Prev

Next

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True or False? - If necessary, a RFDS aircraft will fly to a cattle station, a mine site or even to where the accident has happened.

True

False

Prev

Next

7 / 10

True or False? - Once on board a RFDS aircraft, the injured or sick person can be treated using the equipment on board.

True

False

Prev

Next

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True or False? - The RFDS service is not able to give advice over the phone for sick or injured people in the outback.

True

False

Prev

Next

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True or False? - RFDS Nurses travel to remote places in the outback to give treatment to sick people.

True

False

Prev

Next

10 / 10

True or False? - The RFDS also provides information to people living in the outback so they can stay healthy.

True

False

Prev

See Result

Your score is

The average score is 90%

Vocabulary

□ Play accidents = when something goes wrong. For example, a car crash. In accidents, you sometimes get hurt

□ Play aircraft = an aeroplane. It flies through the sky and

carries people to other places.

- Play bandages = used to wrap a part of your body which has been injured
- Play bases = a place where the RFDS has its aircraft and where it can also treat sick people
- Play cattle stations = very large area of land used to raise cattle for meat
- Play charity = when money is given in order to help someone in need
- Play clinics = a place where doctors or nurses provide help to those who are sick
- Play communicate = when messages are passed from one person to another. For example by telephone or radio
- Play conducted = when something is undertaken. For example, a search was conducted.
- Play consultations = when you go to see the doctor about your sickness
- Play emergency = when somebody is very sick and they need a doctor very soon.
- Play employs = when a person works for a company or organisation
- Play equipment = the tools which help you do something. For example, a heart monitor
- Play evacuations = when people are taken away from a place
- Play experience = when you go through an event
- Play immunization = when you are given a medicine which stops you from getting a sickness

- Play impossible = it cannot be done
- Play intensive care units = a place where very sick people get the best of care
- Play invented = when someone thinks of and builds something new which no one else has thought of.
- Play isolated = when a place is a long way from any other place. There are no other towns nearby.
- Play maternal = to do with being a mother
- Play mining = digging valuable minerals (like gold) from the ground
- Play organise = to get things in order
- Play organization = where a large number of people work together
- Play outback = the parts of Australia which are a long way from the city
- Play pedal powered radio = a radio which makes its own electricity using pedals from a bicycle
- Play pregnant = when a woman is going to have a baby
- Play prescribing = when the doctor tells you what medicine you should have
- Play prevention is better than cure = when you get sick, a doctor can cure you. But it is better not to get sick at all
- Play promoting = when you tell people about something which is good for them
- Play remote locations = places which have few people and are a long way from cities
- Play Reverend = a type of priest in a Christian church

- Play road house = on the highway, where you can buy petrol and something to eat
- Play Royal = means that the Queen supports this service and has said it can use the word Royal in its name
- Play screening = when people are tested in a group to see if they have a disease
- Play sensitive = things that are hard to talk about. For example, when something is very personal
- Play single engine propeller = an aircraft which has one propeller to make it move through the air
- Play special health facilities = a place where sick people are treated
- Play state-of-the-art = the best you can get
- Play travelling = to go from one place to another
- Play twin = two
- Play unique = when something is the only one of its kind.
- Play urgent = when something must be done now or very soon