Q: **Who qualifies as an “elderly or disabled family member”?**

A: Any family member 65 years or older is considered “elderly” for Life Flight Networks qualifications. And a disabled family member is any family member living in your home who receives disability benefits.

Q: **Are there other Life Flight operations in the Walla Walla Area that aren’t a part of the LifeFlight network?**

A: Life Flight Network (LFN) service is the only air ambulance program in Southeast Washington. The next closest would be Airlift Northwest based out of Seattle. They have four bases and they are also a non-profit and therefore reciprocate with LFN on Membership. There is a singular base in Bend, called Airlink, that is a for-profit operation and they do not reciprocate with LFN or Airlift Northwest. LFN’s closest bases to Walla Walla are Richland, Pendleton, and Lewiston; with a total of 25 basis throughout Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana.

Q: **What areas does Life Flight Network provide coverage for? Does it reach beyond Oregon/Washington/Idaho?**

A: Life Flight Network (LFN) is a component of state emergency communications (911) and when called their Communications Center in Boise activates their nearest appropriate air ambulance service to the person in need. As LFN covers Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Western Wyoming, they are not called on by first responders outside that region.

While LFN can fly great distances on fixed wing aircraft, they will only take the aircraft as far as they need to go to reach the nearest, appropriate medical facility for each incident. For example, if someone in Walla Walla suffered severe burns and St. Mary’s hospital activated LFN, they would fly this patient to Harborview medical center in Seattle. If the same incident occurred in Butte, Montana, they would fly the patient to the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. If one of LFN’s members suffered the same injuries in Texas, they would not be the responding air ambulance.

Q: **Do you do non-emergency medical transportation?**

A: LifeFlight Network does transport people, some from very distant hospitals such as Los Angeles, Honolulu, North Carolina, Minnesota, and more, back to the northwest as non-emergency transportation. Typically this occurs when people have a great distance to travel and want a medical team accompanying them. But as these are non-emergency flights, they would not be covered by Membership with LFN.

Q: **What situations qualify as an emergency transport for LifeFlight Network?**

A: For Membership to cover patient transport, the incident does not have to be life-threatening (like what most insurance policies require), it only needs to be an emergency. For example, LFN has flown people out of rural locations with a dislocated shoulder, broken femur, broken hip, etc. None of these injuries are considered life-threatening in themselves, but they are deemed an emergency because of where they occurred.
Q: **Who calls Life Flight Network for transportation?**

A: If it is a hospital-to-hospital transport, the sending physician makes that call and a certificate that deems medical necessity accompanies the transport. If it is a scene call, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) must activate Life Flight Network. This does not mean EMS needs to come on scene and assess the illness or injury; many times in rural locations the EMS provider has made the call to activate LFN based on location and description of illness or injury without seeing the patient. We can be activated by law-enforcement, fire district personnel, EMS, Search and Rescue, the U.S. Forest Service, and Department of Lands. Sometimes, LFN may fly to a patient and not transport them depending on changes in the status of their need. If this happens, there is no charge to the patient or the hospital.

Q: **Don’t most medical insurance companies cover life-flights?**

A: Not necessarily. Some insurance covers a portion of flight cost; very few cover an entire flight cost. Some insurance companies only cover transports for life-threatening injuries/illnesses. Sometimes, individuals have been flown with the belief that their insurance covers that cost, but their insurance may dispute payment because they deem it non-life-threatening.

**Note:** For employees on Walla Walla University’s medical insurance, below is the explanation of benefits excerpt from our plan document, relating to ambulatory services (including air ambulance).

**AMBULANCE SERVICES**

The Plan pays a percentage of the charges for necessary professional emergency ambulance transportation to the hospital for inpatient treatment or outpatient treatment of an accident, and any medical services provided en route. It is expected that ambulance services will be used only when medically necessary and involving life threatening conditions such as severe bleeding, severe breathing difficulty, unconsciousness or serious injury.

Your Plan will cover Ambulance Transport Services (professional air or ground) to the nearest adequate hospital, urgent care center, or nursing facility to treat your illness or injury. Local air and ground ambulance means that you or your eligible dependents are transported to a hospital, urgent care center, or nursing facility in the surrounding area where your ambulance transportation began.

The Plan will cover your ambulance transport provided the following criteria are met:

1. No other method of transportation is appropriate.
2. The services necessary to treat this illness or injury are not available in the hospital or nursing facility where you may be an inpatient.
3. The hospital or nursing facility is nearby and adequate facilities are available to treat your medical condition.
4. Coverage for air ambulance services has been pre-certified by the Plan Administrator. Any ambulance transportation other than to a facility for urgent treatment must have prior approval. Non-approved charges will not be paid.

*Citation: North American Division Benefits, Healthcare Assistance Plan Document, 2017, page 31.*