



NEWS RELEASE

EUROPE REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

CMR. 442 APO AE 09042
U.S. ARMY HOSPITAL – NACHRICHTEN KASERNE
POSTFACH 103180 69021 HEIDELBERG, GERMANY
DSN 371-3317/3049 TEL. 06221-7-3317/3049
JERI CHAPPELLE – 0162-270-0456

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Bridging cultural differences

Patient Liaison Program enters its 13th year

HEIDELBERG, Germany – Picture 230,000 Soldiers and 500,000 of their family members living in Europe. Eleven Army hospitals and 56 outlying clinics providing health care to them, as well as providing space-available care to more than 4,000 retirees and 210,000 civilian employees.

By 1995, the picture had changed completely. Three hospitals and 28 clinics remained. The health care provider population was so small that the specialists had been almost completely replaced by generalists. Americans began receiving referrals for specialty care downtown in large numbers. Out of this grew a need to have a way to assist Americans who became patients in host nation facilities. And, the Host Nation Patient Liaison (HNPL) program was born.

“If there’s one thing people need to know about health care, it’s how to notify their Patient Liaison,” said Lesley Lehwald-Verron, Europe Regional Medical Command HNPL consultant and one of the original liaisons hired. “We work with the local health care facilities daily.” She explained that when a doctor refers a patient to an off-post provider, the HNPL is notified.

“But in an emergency, when a family may need us most, we don’t know about it right away unless the patient or someone in their family notifies us,” she said. The local facilities know to report American admissions, but the notification might not happen until the next morning.

Patient Liaisons are fluent in English and the host nation language. They are familiar with medical terminology and can assist patients with communication. This ensures that the patient and the hospital staff have a complete understanding of the medical condition and treatment.

When patients visit their TRICARE Service Center to arrange admission to a hospital, TSC personnel notify the local Patient Liaison. The main priority of the Patient Liaison program is to make visits to patients in host nation hospitals.

Americans under care in host nation hospitals may also contact a Patient Liaison any time for assistance. The Patient Liaison will visit every American patient every duty day and give information on how to contact him or her. There is a Patient Liaison on call in every community for emergencies after hours and on weekends.

In the Heidelberg area, which includes the Hanau, Darmstadt, Mannheim, Coleman, Heidelberg and Stuttgart garrisons, patients can get in touch with the on-call liaison by calling the Heidelberg Medical Department Activity duty desk at 06221-172605 or DSN 371-2605.

As Senior Master Sgt. Connie Leah, a recent new mother in Stuttgart said, “There are so many unique and challenging issues with being overseas, it is such a sigh of relief to have a program that can not only run so successfully, but also to have a service being provided that is truly invaluable to military members and their families”.