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New way to fly

Air St. Luke's helicopter modern and functional

ONTARIO — Air St. Luke's showed off one of its newest air ambulances Thursday in Ontario, giving personnel at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Ontario an opportunity to see what is new with the aircraft.

Air St. Luke's currently uses a Bell 430 helicopter, but the new Bell 429 has many new modifications. Crew members from the team that will be running the helicopter were on hand to answer questions Thursday.



Air St. Luke's pilot Steve Sandmeyer takes a look into the patient section of the new Bell 429 helicopter as it is parked at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center-Ontario Thursday morning. The new helicopter was in the area to allow medical personnel to become familiar with the new helicopter.

Air St. Luke's purchased two new helicopters to cover the Treasure Valley and Magic Valley areas. The helicopters are scheduled to be up and running Sept. 25. Air St. Luke's flight nurse Jeff Weese said the new helicopters will hold up to two patients or a

patient and a family member. Everything on the helicopter is designed for ease of use and functionality for emergency medical situations. The cockpit and the patient area of the aircraft are divided so when a patient area needs to be well lit at night, the pilot will still be able to have a dark cockpit and full use of night-vision goggles.

All the chairs in the patient area are able to be moved around, along with the gurney as well. The medical instruments are also easily accessible to the emergency responders, and can also be tilted and adjusted as needed for better vision of the instruments.

"They are designed for EMS," Air St. Luke's pilot Steve Sandmeyer said of the new helicopter. "There is better altitude performance equipment, stronger engines and really nice patient care facilities."

Sandmeyer said everything in the helicopter has been designed to better assist the patient. Sandmeyer also said just about every important instrument on the aircraft is a redundant system, meaning if an instrument does not function properly, there is an immediate backup. "That is St. Luke's commitment to safety," Sandmeyer said.

The coverage area for each of Air St. Luke's helicopters is a 150 mile radius, giving a slight overlap in coverage, so no patient is left without services. The stop in Ontario was one of many the two helicopters will be making over the next few days, giving hospital staff around the region a chance to see, first-hand, the improvements that have been made, and to also become familiarized with the new helicopter.