

# PHEM Elective Reflection 2025



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During my medical school elective in my final year of medical school, I had the privilege of being selected to join Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust (EHAAT) for a five-week period of shadowing and placement across Essex and Hertfordshire. This five-week period was one of the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences in my career and allowed me to interact with numerous incredible people and services.

### **About EHAAT**

EHAAT is one of the twenty-one air ambulance charities currently operating in the UK and was established in 1997 when paramedics began responding via helicopter as the area's inaugural, "Essex Air Ambulance". Later in 2007, Hertfordshire Air Ambulance charity was created, and both services would later merge to form Essex and Herts Air Ambulance. This service now is now consultant led, meaning that specialist pre-hospital critical care doctors co-respond alongside specialist critical care paramedics seconded from East of England Ambulance Service.



These doctors come from a variety of specialty backgrounds, including emergency medicine, intensive care and anaesthesia. In order to qualify for this role, they must have completed an extensive sub-specialty training programme to prepare them both in terms of clinical skills and decision making for the most intense and challenging scenarios faced by pre-hospital crews. The skill mix created by this partnership allows for the highest level of critical care to be delivered in the community, including major open-heart surgery, pre-hospital emergency anaesthesia and lifesaving maternity and perinatal interventions. The service primarily responds via their fleet of Leonardo AW169 helicopters, but they also utilise rapid response vehicles which carry the same essential kit as their helicopters and can often be seen responding on blue lights at night across the area. EHAAT receives its allocations via the East of England Ambulance (EEAST) control room's critical care desk,





which screens all 999 calls the area receives for jobs that require an enhanced level of care or expertise. These include major trauma, complex post cardiac arrest care, and other clinical scenarios which require the most expertise. The team can also be dispatched to assist EEAAT crews with complex extrications which may require sedation or advanced interventions. The other crucial aspect of EHAAT's operational crew are their pilots. These individuals are selected from both military and civilian candidates and are responsible for the safe operation of the charity's aerial assets. They are essential to the operational capability of the charity as they facilitate the transport of the medical team and their patient from base to scene and anywhere else that might be required. EHAAT also provides a specialist patient liaison service for patients after their care has been delivered. This service is integral to patient wellbeing and recovery from traumatic events and allows for patients to interact with the crew who cared for them and the charity as a whole. Finally, EHAAT is fortunate enough to receive significant support from its army of volunteers, both in terms of fund raising and organisational support. The service absolutely depends on the contributions of their volunteers, as do all Air Ambulance charities across the country.

### ***Clinical experience***

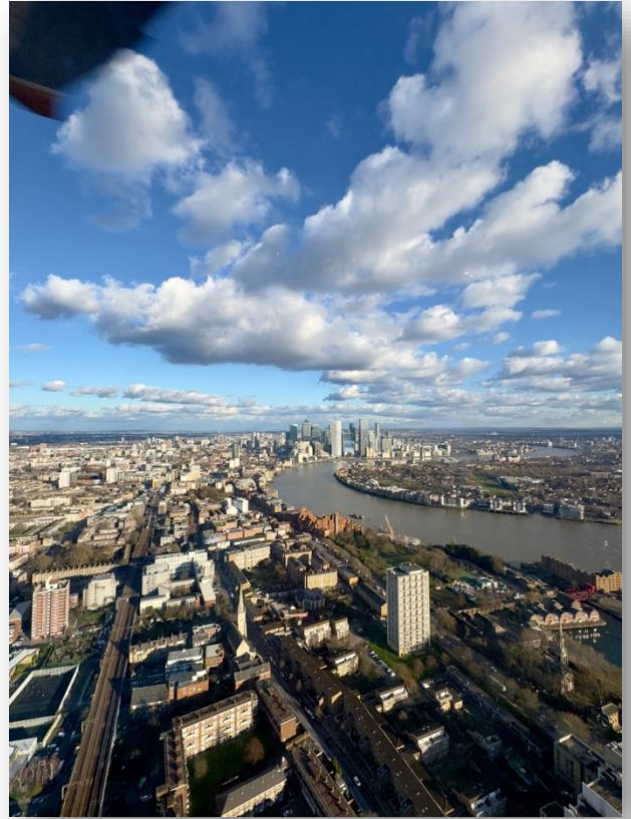
During my time with EHAAT, I was fortunate enough to be allowed to observe several clinical shifts, both on their helicopters and their RRVs. The opportunity to directly observe HEMS teams in action was a highlight of my time in medical school and something that I am incredibly fortunate to have been offered. These shifts took place across EHAAT's operational area from both their bases in Earls Colne and North Weald and gave the opportunity to see that the preparation for delivering the highest standards of care begins as soon as the crew arrive on base.

From kit checks to crew briefings and simulation sessions, the crew involved me in every aspect of their operational delivery, allowing me to assist where possible and appropriate. Across my observer shifts, I attended a variety of jobs, ranging from sporting related to trauma to cardiac arrests and unwell medical patients. Each of these jobs showcased the different skills required by the EHAAT responders, with many of them necessitating impeccable communication skills under pressure and the ability to manage vast teams of people with varying skills levels. From the outset, I was incredibly impressed by each crew's kindness and composure whilst caring for their patient.

My experiences observing EHAAT truly underscored the critical importance of preparation, teamwork, and adaptability in high acuity settings. I was also incredibly fortunate to experience flying into the Royal London Hospital helipad; a moment that felt like a true bucket list experience. Approaching one of the UK's busiest trauma centres from the air, landing on the rooftop helipad with the London skyline in view, was both exhilarating and surreal.



EHAAT are also at the forefront of clinical practice and strive to improve every aspect of their delivery of care, from the initial call to years in the future with their patient liaison service. A particular highlight was the opportunity to observe and participate in high-fidelity simulation training and moulage. These sessions recreated realistic, high stakes scenarios involving trauma and medical emergencies, allowing me to develop essential skills in clinical reasoning, communication, and human factors. The simulation faculty were incredibly supportive, creating a learning environment that was both challenging and constructive. This experience underscored the critical importance of preparation, teamwork, and adaptability in high acuity settings. I was involved in the Trust's wider culture of learning and quality improvement and attended morbidity and mortality (M&M) meetings, where cases were discussed with an emphasis on transparency, reflection, and system level learning. These sessions reinforced the importance of maintaining a just culture in medicine and demonstrated how pre-hospital





teams strive for continuous improvement and learning in an already high performing environment. I also had the opportunity to contribute to EHAAT's Centre for Excellence group, specifically supporting ongoing research into the management of head injuries in the pre-hospital setting. This allowed me to engage with the academic and evidence-based side of pre-hospital care, offering insight into how clinical practice is continually refined through data and research.

### ***Charity and people***

What truly set this elective apart, however, was the warmth and inclusivity of the team. From clinicians and dispatchers to pilots and volunteers, everyone was generous with their time, knowledge, and encouragement. I felt genuinely welcomed and supported throughout, and the team's passion for excellence in patient care was palpable in both the way they treat colleagues and patients. An often-unsung pillar of the organisation is its dedicated team of volunteers. Their tireless work behind the scenes, whether supporting community fundraising, engaging with the public, or assisting at events, is vital to keeping the service operational. It was inspiring to see the passion and commitment of these individuals, whose efforts ensure the continued sustainability of this life saving work. Their contribution is a powerful reminder that pre-hospital care relies not only on clinical expertise, but on a broad and committed community.

**This elective has not only broadened my clinical and academic horizons but has also reinforced my interest in acute care and pre-hospital medicine. I'm immensely grateful to the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance Trust and the Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care for such a formative and memorable experience.**

