

Dr Nadia Swart, flight doctor, Netcare 911

Dr Nadia Swart recently made her milestone 100th mercy mission as a flight doctor with Netcare 911. We go behind the mask to find out more about how she landed (pun intended) her dream job that combines her three loves - medicine, aviation and exploring this beautiful continent.

 By Nicci Botha 16 Mar 2021



Dr Nadia Swart

■ ***You've just completed your 100th flight as a flight doctor. How did you get to this point in your career?***

Swart: I started working as a flight doctor for Netcare 911 in September 2018. After my first flight, which was a medical evacuation from Accra in Ghana, I fell in love with the job. Since then, I've dedicated my time to being available for as many missions as possible.

■ ***What does a typical work day entail?***

Swart: A typical work day starts with a phone call to alert me to an emergency flight. The paramedic and I will then rush to get to Lanseria Airport within 45 minutes. We quickly pack all our medical equipment onto the aircraft, while the pilots from Guardian Air do the flight planning. We aim to be airborne within two hours after activation. At our destination, a ground ambulance will transport the crew with all our equipment to the hospital, where we stabilise and prepare the patient for flight. After arriving back at Lanseria, we will again escort the patient to the receiving hospital and hand the patient over to the accepting specialist. The duration of these missions can be anything from 12 hours to two days.

■ ***What's really behind your mask - literally and figuratively speaking?***

Swart: Behind the mask is a happy 30-year-old female with a passion for medicine and aviation.

■ ***What excites you about your job?***

Swart: I get the opportunity to see Africa and the surrounding islands, one medical evacuation at a time. I love being in the air, which alongside my passion for medicine is the perfect combination.

▄ ***What are the challenges and the joys of your job?***

Swart: I am blessed to be surrounded by amazing colleagues and friends. My team consists of myself, a Netcare 911 paramedic and pilots from Guardian Air - our fixed wing service provider. The ground crew at Netcare flight desk and Guardian Air operations also contribute immensely to successfully completing our missions.

The size of the above-mentioned team is also one of the greatest challenges. When a patient deteriorates in the air, we do not have additional hands available so we have to be very resourceful. We also work in a small environment with the stressors of flight contributing to the difficulty of the job, therefore keeping a cool head is essential.

▄ ***How has Covid-19 impacted your work?***

Swart: During the initial implementation of Covid-19 restrictions, all flight crew had to quarantine for 14 days in a hotel room after each flight. We were able to do subsequent medical evacuations to other countries but when we returned we went straight back into quarantine. I spent almost two months isolated in a hotel room during 2020. The restrictions have now eased and only symptom monitoring is required after flights. Additional approvals from South African national government departments as well as from the referring country need to be obtained, which makes the process of planning such a flight considerably more complex.

▄ ***What do you do in your down time?***

Swart: I enjoy being outdoors and swimming. I also like to relax with friends over a glass of wine or bubbly and spend time with my family.

▄ ***What does the future hold for you?***

Swart: Hopefully, completing my 200th mission within the next two years. I have many more countries to visit for work and would like to spend more time improving my skills to become the best possible flight doctor I can be. I am also looking forward to being able to just travel and explore.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.
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