

International Nurses Day profile | Marijoice Abordo, Allianz Global Assistance

We all know Australians are keen travellers, but when something goes awry on your overseas holiday adventure, who are you going to call?

Repatriation is the return of someone to their home country due to extreme sickness or injury when travelling overseas. Global assistance company, Allianz Global Assistance's repatriation nurses are essential in helping sick or injured Australians return home. In 2018, before you-know-what, Allianz Global Assistance helped more than 150 injured Australians to come home – that's nearly 3 people every week.

Patients are usually transported back to Australia on commercial business class flights with one nurse, but the pandemic caused a logistical nightmare for injured Aussies overseas who could not return home due to border closures.

Marijoice Abordo is a long-time registered nurse, joining Allianz Global Assistance in 2018 after moving to Australia from Singapore in 2016 with her family. She said that when the pandemic hit in March 2020, she had to completely re-evaluate the repatriation process because there were no flights.

"It was really hard when the pandemic hit, especially at the beginning, because we had patients we needed to transport back to Australia but there were just no flights, and the few available flights were fully booked," Ms Abordo said.

This meant in extreme cases, Allianz Global Assistance had to hire air ambulances to transport patients which is more than five times more expensive than a commercial flight.

"We had a patient who urgently needed to travel from Tasmania to New Zealand so we had to hire an air ambulance which is essentially a private jet with a full medical equipment station onboard. What would usually cost approximately \$7K - \$10K and take one nurse, now cost more than \$50,000 and required the assistance of two nurses," Ms Abordo said. "I used to never get travel insurance, but seeing what I see now there is no way I would travel without it" Ms Abordo confesses.

"We suddenly had to consider border exemptions, hospitals that were over capacity, vaccination statuses and border exemptions; just the logistics of what would normally be considered straightforward were increasingly complex. We work together as a global team to ensure each and every patient receives the individual support and treatment that they need.

"We have a network of treatment hubs throughout the world to where we transport patients to ensure they receive timely medical attention. However the pandemic presented its own challenges. Some patients were stuck overseas for extended periods of time where usually we would have transported them home easily". Although Marijoice works for Allianz Global Assistance full time, during the pandemic when nurses were in high demand and the health system was under immense strain, she became a qualified vaccination nurse.

"I used to work with Queensland Health as a ward nurse so during the pandemic they contacted me to help with administering vaccinations which I was happy to do. We weren't doing repatriation flights so it felt nice to be able to help during this important time.

"Now international borders have opened I'm excited to get back to travel nursing. It comes with its own set of challenges, like assessing a patient over the phone and the logistics of returning them safely home for treatment, but it's incredibly rewarding and a great way to help others in a different way."

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