The accident happened on a sunny Monday morning, a few months before Ryan Lockard’s 20th birthday. Being such a nice day, he’d decided to go for a drive. But while driving he had a sudden seizure. The car careened across the median strip and hit another vehicle. From that moment, his life was in the balance.

At the CareFlight rapid response helicopter base, the team had just completed the morning’s routine checks and briefings. It’s the same routine at the start of every shift to make sure they can take off as quickly as possible.

The call came in at 7.37am. The crew were airborne in five minutes and arrived on the scene within nine minutes of the call.

Ryan was still trapped in the car. Ambulance officers were there but Ryan was highly agitated and moving so much the paramedics couldn’t insert a drip to administer drugs to calm him and get him out.

He was bleeding badly from a deep wound over his left eye, causing his blood pressure to drop dramatically.

Ryan needed a doctor and intensive care unit level of intervention - fast. Dr Adam Sroor, an experienced emergency rescue doctor with CareFlight, says that as soon as they landed everyone on the team knew precisely what to do.

“We know that taking hospital-level care to patients as soon as possible after they are injured makes a big difference to their recovery prospects – and even their chance of survival. Ryan’s case was extremely serious. As soon as I saw how low his blood pressure was, I knew I had to give him a blood transfusion on the spot. I was also concerned that his chaotic movements were increasing the risk of further spinal injury.”

Dr Sroor put Ryan in an induced coma to prevent him from hurting himself and to protect his airways from any blood entering his lungs.

The CareFlight team could then safely fly Ryan to hospital. At the hospital, further tests showed Ryan had avoided spinal injuries but had a range of serious arm and lower leg fractures, as well as various other fractures to the face, feet and ribs.

Ryan is now well on the road to recovery. A few months on, he explains how lucky he feels; he can walk, he’s suffered no brain damage and the sight in his left eye is perfect, with a nicely healing scar.

“The physician at the hospital said it was likely the CareFlight doctor had saved my eye from permanent damage,” Ryan said. “Without a doubt, things would be very different without CareFlight’s specialist care.

“Because I received intensive emergency care on the scene, I’ve had the best possible outcome. It’s taken a few months, but I’m able to walk again and I can use my arm.”

Ryan has since had the opportunity to meet the CareFlight crew and thank them in person.

“Meeting the CareFlight team at their base was an amazing experience. I got to shake hands with everyone, from the pilot and co-pilot who mapped out the fastest route to my accident, to the doctors who knew exactly what I needed to save my life.”
Female doctors lead new intake at CareFlight

CareFlight has welcomed 10 new doctors to its NSW team, with more women than men in this intake of registrars for the first time ever.

Over the next six to 12 months, these new registrars will be key members of the aeromedical teams working out of CareFlight’s rapid response helicopter base in Westmead and NSW Ambulance’s aeromedical base in Bankstown.

CareFlight’s General Manager Medical Services, Andrew Anderson, said CareFlight starts new registrars every six months as part of its registrar training program, in conjunction with NSW Ambulance.

“This program is highly sought after as registrars spend six months learning to care for the critically ill and injured in pre-hospital and inter-hospital aeromedical retrieval environments,” Mr Anderson said.

“For the first time ever, we have more female than male doctors. This is exciting for the aeromedical industry as we move away from that traditional view of being a very male dominated sector.

“It’s particularly exciting for CareFlight as this year we celebrate our 30th anniversary and remember the many changes we’ve witnessed to our operations over the last three decades.”

Most of our new registrars are locally based, while three hail from the UK and Ireland.

“Every year we get a lot of interest from overseas, especially from the UK. The experience the registrars have with CareFlight is quite unique and totally different from what they are used to back home,” Mr Anderson said.

“Our registrars come from working in emergency departments, anaesthetics and intensive care units. They quickly learn that it is as far removed as you can get from a hospital setting, but that’s what makes our training program and services so rewarding.

“As always, our new doctors are enthusiastically embracing this exciting opportunity to be at the forefront of emergency aeromedical retrieval. We look forward to another successful year,” Mr Anderson said.

After their stint with CareFlight, registrars are accredited with up to six months training by the critical care colleges of emergency medicine, anaesthesia or intensive care.

CareFlight also takes in new registrars as part of its Northern Territory operations in Darwin twice a year.
When Matt Gane’s mustering helicopter came down in a remote corner of the Northern Territory on 12 November 2015, CareFlight launched a complex rescue mission. The mission involved two helicopters, a long range air ambulance and two Darwin based medical teams, as well as a local paramedic.

It triggered the biggest outpouring of support we have seen from the community on our Facebook page to date.

The accident occurred while Matt was mustering in a Robinson R22 helicopter on remote Kiana Station, more than 800km south-east of Darwin and 100km south of Borroloola.

Thirty-year-old Matt was left with a broken pelvis and severe head injuries.

He’s since spoken to ABC radio about how he has defied all the odds in what can only be described as a miraculous recovery.

After spending six weeks in Darwin hospital, Matt was transferred to the Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre in South Australia. From there, he told the ABC Rural program that he was back on his feet, attending daily physical therapy sessions to improve his movement.

The combination of brain injury and a broken pelvis meant he’s had to learn to walk again.

“I feel like there are still a few problems with my brain, like my speech slowing down when I get tired, but they’re getting better and improving every day,” he said.

“I know that I was in the best possible hands, and probably the best in Australia, they have been so good. “I’ve had to do a little bit of rehab from home, as they’ve given me home exercises, so I’m still in a comfortable environment.”

Matt said he owed a great deal of gratitude to the medical staff who treated him, and to his family and friends.

“I have no recollection of it, but I believe CareFlight played a big part in getting me to medical attention,” he said.

“I can’t thank them enough.”

Matt makes a miraculous recovery

Injured tourists flown from highway crash near Larrimah

Two injured tourists were flown to hospital from where their car rolled off the Stuart Highway 420km south-east of Darwin.

A CareFlight doctor and nurse flew to the crash to team with nurses who drove from Mataranka Health Clinic following reports of the crash.

Police blocked the Stuart Highway to allow Darwin’s CareFlight TIO rescue helicopter to land on the road.

A 28-year-old man suffered multiple injuries while a 21-year-old woman escaped with lesser injuries.

After stabilisation by clinic and CareFlight medical teams, the patients were flown on the CareFlight TIO rescue helicopter to Royal Darwin Hospital.

CareFlight operates the Top End Medical Retrieval Service which provides medical rescue and retrieval services to Territorians across the Top End, on behalf of the NT Government.
Every cent helps keep CareFlight in the air

Gail lends a hand in Fiji

CareFlight Top End’s critical care flight nurse Gail Hiatt joined an Australian team deployed to Fiji in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Winston – one of the most devastating tropical cyclones to ever strike the Southern Hemisphere.

At its peak, the Category 5 cyclone was estimated by the Fiji Meteorological Service to have sustained winds of 230kmph gusting to 325kmph. When it hit Fiji on 20 February, it cut a path of destruction across Fiji’s islands, blowing off roofs, bringing down trees and powerlines and flooding rivers.

Dozens of lives were lost and hundreds of thousands more people affected by the widespread destruction.

After a request for help from the Fijian Government, an Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT), including nurses, doctors and paramedics, was deployed to assist.

The self-sufficient, experienced teams can rapidly respond to a disaster zone and provide lifesaving treatment to casualties, in support of the local health response.

Gail was part of a team of six medical personnel from the National Critical Care & Trauma Response Centre AUSMAT team.

Gail and her team drove north from Suva on the main island to Rakiraki to become part of an outreach team.

Over two weeks they assisted the Fijian Government in providing medical treatment to those in need.

Gail lends a hand in Fiji

Gail (far right) and Dr Andrew Magness with Vani, a local primary health care nurse.