



### A flight to nowhere

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**T**oronto Island, actually, but you know. The Ornge helicopter is elsewhere and by the time you might get it the patient would be dead. As happens in a rural doctor's life, you do what needs doing. It's you and your nurse in a single-engine plane. The stretcher is on one side of the cabin, with you on the seat that they have to remove to load the patient, along with a box containing all the hospital's O blood (both + and -) sitting between you.

Your patient of a couple of years had a large pancreatic pseudocyst (no, he's not a drinker) that they stented at St. Mike's just 2 weeks prior. He is now vomiting blood. The smell of melena (you don't forget that) fills the cabin of the Pilatus PC-12. An ancient Lifepak 12 with a frayed cord is occasionally giving you numbers that you occasionally dare to believe relate to the patient. The pilot's shoe string secures the 5 bags of fluid to a ring in the ceiling. Blood pressure 85/60 mm Hg, 82% oxygen saturation, respiratory rate 35 breaths/min. Heart rate? You don't have a number and you don't feel anything at the carotid, but he does ask, "Can I have some more morphine, Doc?" Torn between hope, mercy and fear, you delay — "Only a few more minutes before we land" — and you hold the patient's hand. (Or is he holding yours?)

Whoosh up to Toronto Western where you are met by a smiling attend-

ing who gets the story and then busily and efficiently starts putting in the tubes. A flurry of resident and nursing staff (Is that a respiratory therapist?) — resources that you can only dream about — descend in a busy cloud. "We'll start with an arterial line." "We need a large bore central line." "I need a 16." "Get ready to intubate."

You slowly back away with the faith that he's in good hands here. As you pass the foot of the bed you notice 100 mL of urine in the bag from the flight. You think, "We didn't do so badly either," and prepare the pump, tackle box and other pieces for the journey back.

Getting back is always an issue; getting back from Toronto is a particular challenge. You make it back to the little airport departure lounge but there is no one there. Behind a desk you commandeer a phone and dial the number of the tower — they are used to directing traffic. "Sure make your way to the Porter FBO (fixed base of operations). They'll send a van down to pick you up." Great!

Then you notice that the plane is blue. Yours, you are pretty sure, was white. No worries, the original crew had to leave, but this plane will take you home, first via London and then Sault Ste Marie. Except that the weather has changed and you can't land in Sault Ste Marie, Sudbury or Earleton, and you are flying back to Toronto. Back to flying to nowhere. You know.