



Photo: Prince Edward Island Fishermen's Association/Facebook
Photo:

Group tries new approach to health care at sea

One group is working to make fishermen healthier on land and provide emergency care on the water.

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Recently, Seattle-based fishing company Ocean Peace found itself facing one of a vessel owner's worst nightmares: While out in the middle of the sea, an engineer on board a factory trawler got his finger caught in a block, requiring several stitches.

Cue Dr. Ray Jarris and Dr. Ann Jarris and their team at Discovery Health, which focuses on maritime healthcare.

"They were able to talk the captain through putting nine stitches in the guy's finger," Ocean Peace's Director of Operations and HR Corine Rosado told **IntraFish**. "They worked with us in getting him all the right care and now, the guy is safely back on board working."

Rosado said the company has been working with Discovery Health for more than a year, and "we joke that we have an ER room in the wheelhouse. Our people are not doctors or nurses, but they're talking to our folks via phone and they are very, very patient with them."

Ray Jarris is no stranger to providing medical care to fishermen -- he stumbled upon the field about a quarter-century ago when he was an emergency medicine physician in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood, where many of the top American fishing companies are headquartered.

He'd inevitably get calls from ships about various injuries and illnesses on board, and he developed relationships with these companies, which he formalized by starting his own company, which he later sold.



More recently, he and wife Ann Jarris, also a physician, had a thought: How many of these injuries and illnesses could they prevent, instead of treat, "by taking care of people at sea," Ann Jarris told **IntraFish**.

"Someone asked us 'How can I reduce the cost of medivacs?' That's not the solution, the solution starts way, way earlier."

Discovery Health was born. The Jarrises and their team of four other doctors are focused on "approaching maritime medicine from a comprehensive, proactive stance," Ann Jarris explained.

"The traditional model of waiting for trouble to happen before consulting medical help isn't going to work anymore. The medivac is a series of missed opportunities."

The company works on comprehensive care, making recommendations to vessel owners tailored to the size of the crew and their needs. They put together onboard medical kits for the companies, work to manage controlled substances, such as pain medications, and help owners with overall healthcare needs for both men and women on the crew.

They tour vessels and make trips to Dutch Harbor to really develop relationships and understand the patients' needs.

It's not always simple -- and oftentimes, other doctors are the biggest hurdles, Ann Jarris said. The duo dealt with a diabetic fisherman who was taken off the vessel and had a break to manage his disease on land. The Jarrises connected him with a clinic in his area -- and the doctor soon gave him the go-ahead to return to work, not fully knowing the pressures of being a commercial fisherman at sea.

"We had to tell her, 'This is what they go through,' and she said, 'Oh, he can't go back to that yet,'" Ann Jarris explained. "We understand the US healthcare system and we work to educate the medical industry on the specifics of maritime."

The team is also fully aware of the immense pressures fishermen and vessel owners feel to catch as many fish as possible in the time allotted. For every situation at sea, they assess all the aspects -- does it make sense to bring the ship back to the shore, or send a helicopter out to evacuate the patient, which puts even more people in danger, or can they direct, via telephone, the captain to help the patient?



"That's a difficult line to walk," Ray Jarris said. "We look at distances, sea conditions, what exactly they have in their medical kit on board. We have successfully cured appendicitis at

sea with antibiotics. It's possible."

While these cases are the most dramatic part of their jobs, the most important is preventing them, Ann Jarris said. The company works on screenings for the fishermen, medical advice and working to manage any conditions before the fishermen go out to fish. Discovery Health's current clients are all American, but the Jarrises are open to global clients, as well.

"We've already seen how we're improving health, preventing injury and illness, prolonging careers and saving insurers and companies a lot of money," Ann Jarris said. "This makes us excited to keep going."

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