

# KwaZulu Private Ambulance's footprint continues to grow

**H**artmann Emergency Care was established in 1998 by brothers, Hans and Ray Hartmann, after initially starting a private ambulance operation in 1993. Under the banner of this company, several divisions have been established over the years under management and direction of the two brothers.

KwaZulu Private Ambulance has the largest footprint in KwaZulu-Natal of any private medical ambulance, with bases strategically positioned to offer an interlinking service to its clients. Fixed operational bases are located in Pietermaritzburg, Shelly Beach, Empangeni, Nongoma, Ulundi, Vryheid, Newcastle and Estcourt. A total of 14 ambulances and 10 rapid response vehicles are operational at any one time, with staff ranging from basic life support, intermediate life support and advanced life support.

KwaZulu Private Ambulance was originally established to service the smaller, rural areas that had no access to specialist emergency facilities. There was a need to supply immediate transportation to critical patients who could not wait for the overburdened public services system for transportation. In those days, there were also endless difficulties in



*KwaZulu Private Ambulance has bases strategically positioned  
Photo credit: Philip Parker*

transporting patients across provincial borders in provincial ambulances. The service grew from these humble beginnings to where it is today. The majority of its client base still originates from areas traditionally avoided by the bigger industry players.

When the service first started, there were very few other private ambulance services operating in KwaZulu-Natal. Due to this industry being seemingly unregulated in the field, there has been a massive increase in private operators in the province. In the Empangeni/Richards Bay area, there has been a boom from three private operators a few years back, to a current saturation of 26 different private operators having

started up within two years. This trend is emerging in many of the smaller towns and leads to fierce competition.

Co-owner of Hartmann Emergency Care, Ray Hartmann states, "In many instances, this has led to unscrupulous operators not always able to benefit the patient in need. Hopefully this will soon become more regulated and controlled."

## Vehicles and staff

All ambulances are crewed by basic and intermediate life support staff, operating on a shift basis. Advanced life support paramedics in rapid response vehicles play a vital supporting role to the ambulance fleet. Currently 72 full time ambulance personnel are employed, of which 37 have basic life support, 28 intermediate life support and seven advanced life support experience. Each base has a base manager reporting directly to three area managers. The head office is located in Hillcrest, Durban, with 14 administration and control room staff who are also medically trained. A full time compliance officer ensures that all staff, vehicles and equipment are always up to standard in all requirements and ensures that minimum healthcare requirements are surpassed.

## Training

Hartmann Emergency Care prides itself on its service delivery, community upliftment and staff development. Several staff members are sent for ▶



*Advanced life support paramedics in rapid response vehicles play a vital supporting role to the ambulance fleet, Photo credit: Philip Parker*

## Emergency medical service

- ▶ higher level training every year and in this year alone, six members have already upgraded from basic ambulance to intermediate life support levels. Some of their advanced life support staff is in the process of upgrading their diplomas to degrees or even masters. Hartmann Emergency Care has several volunteers who joined the permanent ambulance crew in order to complete their 1 000 hours operational requirements. This is necessary to upgrade their training to the next level. Once these volunteers have completed their required hours, they make way for the next volunteers.

### Services offered

The service responds to a vast variety of calls. House calls, motor vehicle accidents, work related accidents and long-distance inter-hospital transfers are a daily occurrence and are available 24 hours a day. Primary or emergency calls are the company's forte. The emergency number has been extensively marketed to ensure quick access to the public.

To cater for all emergencies, KwaZulu Ambulance Service has placed particular importance on the re-equipping and upgrading of its entire operation with brand new equipment. The latest acquisition consists of 10 LifePac12 and eight Mindray defibrillation monitors, four ventilators and neonate transfer equipment. It is testimony to the company's reinvestment policy in ensuring high service delivery standards. A new fleet of vehicles is currently being

converted to replace the existing fleet to keep these new and reliable. Rapid response vehicles include a GTI, Toyota 86 as well as a Nissan 350Z.

To cater for higher levels of incoming calls and administration, the service has substantially invested in state of the art call centre software, branded as Ambulance and Emergency Dispatch (AED). This software is local industry specific and designed to assist ambulance control rooms in logging and dispatching criteria. The system has also been developed to supply all statistics that the ambulance owner / operator could ever need, including call statistics, response times, total mileage (both billable and non-billable), staff statistics, etc. This can be remotely accessed by the relevant managers. It is also linked to live vehicle tracking, direct dispatching of vehicles, including address and global positioning system (GPS) co-ordinates that are sent directly to the vehicle. The company will also make this software available to any reputable service in the country. It is managed by an outside company and confidentiality is guaranteed.

The switchboard system has also been upgraded to high standard levels with digital lines. All calls are voice recorded with TruLog technology and form an integral part in the company's quality assurance program." KwaZulu Private Ambulance has always placed the "interests of the patient first", the company's motto which resounds in

everything they do!" says Ray Hartmann of Hartmann Emergency Care.

The various divisions which had been established over the years include:

Event Medical Services (EMS), a division specialising in supplying ambulances and staff at sporting and other special events. This division has its own dedicated fleet of vehicles, comprising of 4x4 and conventional ambulances. There are currently 12 ambulances, two quads and three motorbikes in this division;


KwaZulu Private Emergency Care Training Academy (KPECTA) trains all levels of first aid, basic fire fighting, CPD, health and safety, as well as basic ambulance assistant courses. These are offered at various training facilities throughout the province.

KwaZulu Health and Safety supplies a fully comprehensive service to events and the industry, which includes providing of safety plans and procedures, accident investigations and advisory services.

HEC Staffing Solutions supplies industry specific staff to clients, whether medical staff at shopping centers, specialist control room or clinical staff.

HEC Ambulance Conversions is the vehicle conversion factory where ambulances and response vehicles are built, according to South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) specification. As authorised body converters, converted vehicles for both the South African market, as well as neighboring countries, are supplied and finally, HEC Logistics operates a fleet of over 130 vehicles throughout South Africa.

These vehicles transport blood and other biohazardous materials between clinics and laboratories in specialised vehicles, collectively covering in excess of 17 000 km per day. Fluctuations in petrol prices have a major impact on this operation.

Staff consists of almost 200 dedicated individuals, pivotal to making a difference in people's lives. The company's current Level 2 BEE rating bears testimony to its belief in upliftment and being part of the greater vision. 



Front: Sifiso Ndlovu and Philani Buthelezi

Back: Lubabalo Ngumbela, SA Hlongwane, Timothy Reddy, Praga Gouenden and Colin Watson, Sapphire Ryan, Photo credit: Philip Parker