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Membership Brings Overseas Traveler Home When Sickness Strikes

John Slanina's heart bypass couldn't stop him from seeing the world, but it did make him think twice about being thousands of miles from his doctors.

When he and his wife Frances planned a Mediterranean cruise, the well-seasoned travelers packed passports, traveler's checks and clothes for any climate ... they were ready for anything. But just to be on the safe side, Slanina checked with his cardiologist, who recommended Slanina also purchase the Air Ambulance Card, a pre-paid air medical transportation membership, in case something should go wrong.

Six days into the trip, something did go wrong. It wasn't his heart. "I thought it was just a cold," said John Slanina. The ship's doctor confirmed Slanina had pneumonia. After spending three days in the ship's infirmary, the doctor suggested Slanina be admitted to the closest hospital, which was in Rome, Italy.

"I was thousands of miles away from home and my doctor," said Slanina. But his Air Ambulance Card was right in his back pocket. The membership provides hospital-to-hospital air medical transportation. While some similar services just transport members to the nearest appropriate hospital, Slanina got to choose where he wanted to go. "I wanted to be home," said Slanina, who lives in Rapid City, SD. "I wanted to be where I knew the doctors and knew the hospital." A commercial flight home was not an option for Slanina since he needed oxygen and medical care.

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When Sickness Strikes Overseas

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Like Slanina, more Americans are traveling farther from home. This new breed of traveler is more concerned about safety and security than ever. Trip insurance policies may offer air medical services, but travelers need to be wary of restrictions. Some trip insurance policies may even refuse to pay anything for transportation if the company physician decides the foreign hospital is adequate. Fortunately, Slanina's membership had neither restriction. "He could have been treated in Italy and released within 10 days," said Stan Bradley, executive vice president of Air Ambulance Card, "but he just wanted to come home, so we made it happen." The membership also allowed Slanina's wife, Frances, to fly back with him. The only requirement is that a member be hospitalized while traveling 150 miles or more from home and have a confirmed bed at the destination hospital.

Slanina paid \$295 for an annual family membership. If he had to pay for the flight out-of-pocket, he could have easily spent more than \$65,000.

"I'm just glad we knew about Air Ambulance Card, because a lot of people don't know about this," said Slanina. "After what happened, I recommend this service to my family and friends."

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