



I recently had a conversation with Department Wellness Coordinator Whit Pauly and was talking with him about a problem that has caught some of our members off guard. I asked him to share it with you.

*Have you ever thought of what might happen if you or a loved one needed immediate emergency medical treatment while visiting a foreign country? My partner and I have been involved in several incidents recently where our officers or their loved ones were visiting a foreign country and became seriously injured and required immediate medical attention. In two of the last three incidents, the hospital would not administer or facilitate needed emergency medical treatment until a large payment was received.*

*One incident involved an LAPD sworn employee who was vacationing with her family in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, and was seriously injured in an ATV accident. She was transported by ambulance to an area hospital and admitted for a serious leg injury. The medical staff took several hours to complete the preliminary tests (x-rays, etc.) and advised the family that she required life-threatening surgery. However, they were ill-equipped to handle the surgery and the officer needed to be transported to a larger hospital. The hospital staff told the family that she could not be moved from their hospital until \$25,000 was paid to them for medical and transportation services rendered thus far. Another problem that surfaced was the additional high cost of subsequent air-ambulance transportation if arranged by the hospital.*

*Another recent incident involved an LAPD sworn employee's daughter who was visiting Bangkok, Thailand, and was struck by a car. She was transported by ambulance and admitted into the hospital for broken bones and head trauma. After hospital staff completed preliminary tests, they told family members that she would need surgery immediately, however, they would not begin surgery until the hospital received \$50,000.*

*I hope the majority of our officers and their loved ones who become ill or injured in a foreign country don't run into these types of problems. However, over the past several years, my partner and I have been involved with incidents every year where our employees or their loved ones ran into difficulties when needing emergency medical treatment in a foreign country. I am a fan of the old adage, "hope for the best but plan for the worst." I encourage anyone planning a trip outside of the United States to do what you can before you leave to make your trip as safe as possible. The following tips for traveling abroad can be found on the U.S. Department of State's website, <http://travel.state.gov>.*

***Quick tips to make your travel abroad easier and safer:***

***Sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program so the State Department can better assist you in an***

***emergency:*** Let us know your travel plans through the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free online service at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the U.S., or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, information on your welfare and whereabouts will not be released to others without your express authorization.

**Sign your passport and fill in the emergency information:** Make sure you have a signed, valid passport and a visa, if required, and fill in the emergency information page of your passport.

**Leave copies of your itinerary and passport data page:** Leave copies of your itinerary, passport data page and visas with family or friends, so you can be contacted in case of an emergency.

**Check your overseas medical insurance coverage:** Ask your medical insurance company if your policy applies overseas and if it covers emergency expenses, such as medical evacuation. If it does not, consider supplemental insurance.

**Familiarize yourself with local conditions and laws:** While in a foreign country, you are subject to its laws. The State Department website at [http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis\\_pa\\_tw/cis/cis\\_4965.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_4965.html) has useful safety and other information about the countries you will visit.

**Take precautions to avoid being a target of crime:** To avoid being a target of crime, do not wear conspicuous clothing or jewelry and do not carry excessive amounts of money. Also, do not leave unattended luggage in public areas and do not accept packages from strangers.

**Contact us in an emergency:** Consular personnel at U.S. Embassies and Consulates abroad and in the U.S. are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to provide emergency assistance to U.S. citizens. Contact information for U.S. Embassies and Consulates appears on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Also note that the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs may be reached for assistance with emergencies at (888) 407-4747 if calling from the U.S. or Canada or (202) 501-4444 if calling from overseas.

As in the two incidents described earlier, when my partner or I get notified (usually by RACR) that a Department employee, spouse or dependent child has been seriously injured in a foreign country and is having problems receiving emergency medical treatment or is having problems getting out of a foreign hospital, we contact the LAPD Foreign Prosecution Liaison Unit, Fugitive Warrant Section, Gang and Narcotics Division for assistance. I can tell you from personal experience that without this Unit's expertise, contacts, dedication and concern for their fellow officers and their families, none of the emergency situations that I have been involved with would have turned out as successfully as they did. The next call we make on behalf of the injured person or their family is to the Binational Emergency Medical Care Committee. This Chula Vista, California non-profit agency helps bring ailing Americans stranded in Mexico back to the U.S. The agency has helped us with emergency situations in other countries as well. The agency's Executive Director, Celia Diaz, and her staff negotiate with hospitals, ambulance companies and medical insurance companies to keep costs low and coordinate the injured person's safe transportation back to the states. In the situations I have been involved with, Celia and her staff have been extremely helpful and effective in cutting through the red tape and getting our people home safely. Celia's agency can be reached at (619) 425-5080 or [www.binationalemergency.org](http://www.binationalemergency.org).

Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the Foreign Prosecution Liaison Unit, the Binational Emergency Medical Care Committee, other individuals, agencies and embassies, negotiations were successful with the hospitals, ambulance companies, air transportation companies and insurance companies in Cabo San Lucas and in Bangkok, and our people received the emergency medical treatment they needed and eventually got home safely. In most of these kinds of situations, our officers are surprised that the health care system in the foreign country was so different than the one in the United States. Needless to say, when you travel outside of the United States, it is at your own risk. So the next time you are planning a trip outside of the country, please consider the tips for traveling abroad and have contingency plans in place should things go wrong. Wishing you and your family a fun and safe trip!

— Whit Pauly, Cell: (213) 925-0963

*Whit and his partner, Sgt. II Mary Kite, (213) 944-6819, are Department Wellness Coordinators assigned to the Office of the Chief of Police. They represent the chief when assisting the most seriously ill and injured Department employees and their immediate family members and are on call 24/7 to respond to catastrophic events involving Department employees, their spouses and dependent children. The Wellness Coordinator for civilian employees is MAII Antonia Diaz; her cell is (213) 216-7009. I'd like to thank Whit and Mary for what they do. I have called on them both, at all hours, to help one of our own who is in immediate need and they are always available. Helping each other is truly a team effort.*

I hope you've found this information helpful. As always, I can be reached at (661) 510-6129 or via email at [markcronin@lappl.org](mailto:markcronin@lappl.org) and be careful on and off duty. You really just never know.