

Source: Sunday Times Travel

Date: 13 April 2003

BA, Virgin install hi-tech life-saver

Katrina Manson

Following the successful onboard diagnosis and treatment of a passenger suffering from a heart attack on a BMI British Midland flight, British Airways and Virgin have confirmed that they, too, will install the technology. BMI cabin crew saved the life of Stephen Clarke, 50, by using the Tempus2000 unit after he experienced cardiac arrest on a flight from Chicago to Manchester.

The machine measures vital blood indicators, such as pressure, oxygenation and pulse, and takes an electrocardiogram (ECG) reading that doctors on the ground can use to evaluate how flight attendants should best treat the patient.

So far, BMI is the only airline in the world to carry the equipment, but BA will launch a trial on transatlantic services later this month, and Virgin hopes to have the system on all its long-haul flights by the end of the year.

While airlines have long been able to make contact with medical staff on the ground, and most carry defibrillators to stimulate the heart if it stops, the British trio will be the only ones that offer video links and the ability to transmit an ECG. 'It's a very fancy piece of kit' says the International Air Transport Association. 'Its also very easy to use. We may eventually see this sort of equipment extended across all airlines.'

But it seems that customer care is not the airlines' only motivation. 'Diverting a plane for a medical emergency can cost as much as £500,000,' says BA. 'So the technology will offer a real benefit if it allows successful onboard treatment.'