

X Global Medical Assistance

Belgian company Global Medical Assistance (www.gma.be) talked about its services for providing a managed medical assistance services to vessels at sea.

The company was founded in August 2000 by Dr Rob Verbist, medical advisor to the Port of Antwerp, who wanted to find a better way of getting in contact with vessels to provide medical advice and help where needed.

The medical advice is actually provided by doctors in Dr Verbist's clinic and a network of specialists around the world, about 25 staff in total. They can provide advice over the telephone, or by reviewing digital photographs and indicating on the photographs how first aid should be administered.

In one case, he said, a captain experienced in medical matters sought emergency help by helicopter because he thought a seafarer had appendicitis, although the vessel was 12 hours from the next port.

GMA suggested that the seafarer take a urine test, the results of this suggested a urinal infection. It recommended that antibiotics were administered, which resulted in the seafarer being cured in just 8 hours and the shipping



*Haydn Jones, marketing manager
Brian Mullan, head of maritime services, Ireland*

company making substantial savings by not calling out a helicopter.

One of the most useful services GMA offers is to offer medical advice based on photographs. The seafarers can e-mail a photograph of a wound to GMA, which can advise the best course of treatment for it. "A small picture can be an enormous help," said Dr Rob Verbist.

The biggest health problem for seafarers is malaria, he said; there are often serious problems with salmonella. "Last night we had a call from a drilling ship where 20 out of 140 crewmembers are sick with salmonella," he said.

David Patraiko

David Patraiko, project manager with the Nautical Institute (www.nautinst.org), emphasised that there can be safety problems onboard vessels associated with too much ship-shore communication. "You've got 2/3 channels squawking at you, there can be information overload," he warned.