

»» TAKING FLIGHT



HOW A UNCG MBA HELPED JOHN CARRICO'S CAREER TAKE OFF

Trained as a flight paramedic, Carrico recently became the business development coordinator for Mission Health's Mountain Area Medical Airlift team. In this role, he builds partnerships with rural hospitals, fire departments, and EMS agencies to provide air medical transport services to rural residents when and where they need them. The team's two medical helicopters airlift critically ill patients from trauma scenes or small hospitals to facilities that can provide higher levels of care.

It's a dream job for someone who loves helping people and responding in times of crisis.

"Even though it can be extremely stressful, there's no place I'd rather be," Carrico says. "It's a real privilege to do what we do, and I don't take that for granted."

After nine years as a flight paramedic for the team, Carrico decided to take his career to the next level through pursuit of an MBA from the Bryan School of Business and Economics. The timing was fortuitous. Right before he received the degree in December 2023, Mission Health created a position designed to promote the medical helicopter service among the region's first-responder agencies.

"I don't think I would have been hired for this had I not had the MBA," Carrico says. "I was able to really leverage my background of being in the field for a long time and knowing all the players with having this additional schooling. It was a nice marriage."

The degree gave him the additional skills and financial acumen he needed for this job. "I was able to build a foundation in business that allowed me to have a seat at the table with CEOs and presidents of hospitals," he said. "Before, I could refer to my experience in the field, but now I have this balance. And while I'm not an expert on finance, I know what's important in these conversations."

His classes helped him understand more about the business of providing healthcare services to all. The helicopters cost up to \$8 million each, and maintenance is expensive. "We have to be financially sound to provide this service," he says. "We want to make sure everyone has the best medical outcome possible, and to do that, we want this to be a service that anyone can access anytime they need it."

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JOHN CARRICO, MBA '23

Having served the western part of the state for 38 years, the Mountain Area Medical Airlift team has transported more than 29,000 patients. Clinical staff and contract pilots work together to operate the service around the clock, and their efforts can shave an hour off the time it would take an ambulance to navigate curving mountain roads. But it's a competitive environment. Today, agencies on the ground have a choice about who to call from several hospital-based and for-profit medical helicopters that operate throughout western NC and neighboring states. That makes Carrico's role in business development important.

"When agencies call us, they really need us because something serious is going on," he says. "I want to make sure our care and the transition for the patient is the smoothest it can be."

The Obvious Choice

Carrico came to the job after working in various disaster-relief functions, including service in the AmeriCorps during Hurricane Floyd. From there, he worked with the Eagle's Nest Foundation in Winston-Salem, taking high school students on expeditionary programs all over the world. But when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005, he realized how much he missed helping people. He got his degree as a paramedic and returned to the field, working his way up from the ambulance crew to clinical educator to assistant supervisor and then a flight paramedic.

As he thought about where to pursue his MBA, UNCG's program became the obvious choice. "They were approachable and created avenues for asking questions and talking with alumni and current students," Carrico says. "The fact that I could do the entire degree online was attractive. I work days and nights, and I wanted something that allowed me to pace myself and adapt my schedule." An early riser, he often worked on academics from 5 to 8 a.m. before reporting to work. He also appreciated the in-state tuition and the semester-based programming that allowed him to have ample time to digest the material.

This flexibility was intentional when UNCG began offering the MBA online, says Tuisha Stack, Administrative Director of Graduate Programs. "We were open to what the market was telling us," she said. "We wanted to design a flexible curriculum to meet the students where they are."

Carrico was ready to make a difference and elevate his career, Stack says, and the MBA fit perfectly into that plan.

"Our goal is to make sure our curriculum works for people from all types of professions and to help them harness their skills and experience in a way that they can add value," she says. "John's story is a perfect illustration of our bottom line, which is training students to make an impact wherever they live, work, and serve." ■

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