



Dr. Joseph Pearson sits at the command center in the offices of XtremeMD Feb. 3, in Lafayette. XtremeMD is a local company which is a partnership of emergency physicians, who founded the company to provide on-site emergency care to people onboard offshore platforms via teleconferencing. BRAD KEMPY BKEMP@THEADVERTISER.COM

Company provides on-site medical assessment to offshore workers

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Three years ago, Dr. Joseph Pearson, emergency medicine director at Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center, was treating a heart attack patient flown in via helicopter from an oilrig in the Gulf of Mexico when he latched onto the idea of emergency intervention via video teleconferencing offshore.

The rig worker, then 38 years old, had twice sought medical attention and both times was told

he was OK. Upon his insistence, however, he was flown ashore. By then his condition had reached the point of irreversible heart damage.

Pearson knew that an initial medical screening could have saved the man from a lifelong disability. Yet at that time there wasn't sufficient computer bandwidth to make video teleconferencing possible at remote offshore facilities.

On another occasion, he tended to an offshore rig worker who was air lifted to the hospital on the as-

sumption that he was suffering a life threatening condition when, in fact, he was not.

"That probably cost the company \$75,000 for the medevac flight," Pearson said. "I saw him for an hour and discharged him. He thought he might be having a stroke. But as soon as I laid eyes on the guy I knew he was not having a stroke and dismissed him."

In 2009, Pearson incorporated Xtreme MD, and in December 2010 the company launched a pilot program with Houston-based Nabors Offshore that lasted through February. To communicate with trained on-site personnel and prescribe medications, the company patented what it calls the XMD

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Responder.

The kits, which are about as tall and wide as rolling tool chests, have three tiers — one for a computer and screen, another for implements, such as stethoscopes and blood pressure monitors, and another that contains drawers with prescription and over-the-counter medications for a variety of needs. From their offices on South College Road, the firm's doctors staff around-the-clock shifts via teleconferencing computers that are operated via a cable hookup with fiber optic technology as a backup. In the event of an electrical power outage they automatically convert to a natural gas powered generator.

Pearson has six partners, all physicians. Their initial investment for research and development was about \$1 million. Installing and equipping the responder kits runs about \$50,000 each.

One of the chief advantages of having immediate, on-site medical assessment is that it provides patients, particularly those suffering heart attacks and strokes, a window of time — enough possibly to medevac them to a hospital onshore. There are medications a doctor can prescribe that will slow the progress of a heart attack or a stroke until an operation, if necessary, is performed.

To date, however, most of the 178 "encounters," or screening sessions with rig workers have been preventative in nature.

"The reason is we're trying to get everyone registered and in the data base with their

cholesterol, blood sugar and EKG readings," he said.

Richard Grayson, Nabors manager of health, safety and environment, said the company is happy to have "essential medical treatment for our employees right at the moment they need it.

"Xstreme MD has some fairly unique equipment that caught our eye and we like the doctors, so we agreed to a trial and that was very successful," Grayson added.

With Nabors, a publicly traded Fortune 500 company as its first client, Xstreme MD has its responder kits stationed on five rig platforms. Expectations are that another two will come on line within the next month, and the firm is also in

talks with other major oil companies.

Citing the need for this type of services Xstreme MD offers, Pearson said that, "If it were up to me we'd be on every manne platform in the Gulf of Mexico. I think the time will come when it's necessary."

Nevertheless, he said he spent many sleepless nights in the initial stage of his business venture.

"I expected, honestly that we'd take off sooner than we did," he said. "But at the time we launched the Deepwater Horizon spill happened, and thought it might bankrupt us because everything in the gulf was shut down.

"In hindsight now, with the increased safety regulations, I think it will eventually be our salvation."