

# AND YOU THINK YOUR JOB IS STRESSFUL... We all have to stay cool under minor crises every day – but what if these were major catastrophes? Three women describe events

WORDS BRIDGET FREER PHOTOGRAPHY STEVE SCHOFIELD

## THE FLYING DOCTOR

Doctor Amy Hughes, 31, works with the Kent Air Ambulance Service. A call-out for a three-year-old girl last summer will stay with her forever

Whenever a call comes in about a child, it's always more pressured and more emotional. One of the most dramatic cases I've ever worked on was that of a three-year-old girl, who'd lost nearly all her blood after she'd slipped out of her paddling pool and fallen through a window.

Within three minutes of taking the call we had taken off and, 10 minutes later, landed in a field nearby and sprinted the remaining 500 metres.

From the moment I saw her, my heart was in my mouth. There was blood everywhere. Her mum was cradling her as she lay on the step and calling her name, "Molly", but she wasn't even opening her eyes. A tiny girl with dark hair, she looked very floppy and very white.

We do get called out to patients whose injuries are so severe they can't be saved – and that day, I thought Molly might fall into this category. But as the adrenalin kicked in, I went into clinical care mode and I knew we had to work fast.

Molly had cut a blood vessel. I realised I had to get blood into her quickly, but she'd lost so much, that none of her veins were visible, so we couldn't get a cannula in. The situation was so time-critical that our only option was to get the drill out, drill into both shins and put in an intra-osseous needle.

Up until then the mother had been relatively calm, but now she began to look really frightened.

We put a pressure dressing on Molly's arm, gave her oxygen and packaged her up in bubble wrap to keep her warm before carrying her across the muddy field to the helicopter.

The hardest thing was telling the mum that she couldn't come with us, as Molly's condition was worsening and a paramedic needed to sit in the back of the helicopter with her. By now, both parents were terrified and very upset.

Before we left the scene, I made a rare 'code red' call. That meant that the instant we landed at The Royal London Hospital, an emergency crew would be ready on the hospital's helipad. As soon as the engine stopped, before she was even unloaded, blood would begin to be fed into her.

Afterwards, we rushed her to the resuscitation room where a 15-strong paediatric trauma team was waiting, and I gave the handover.

We have to be 'green' for the next job right away. People have the image of panic and flashing lights, but it's all very controlled. It has to be.

Three weeks later, after her surgery, Molly and her parents came to visit us at the base. She was jumping all over the helicopter and, for me, that was the most emotional part; seeing her fit and well again. Her parents were incredibly thankful, but it's funny getting thanks: this is a job we love doing – and one that is a privilege to do. >

