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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***Airlift Northwest announces change in Ketchikan base operations:
Patients to be transported with jets from either Juneau or Seattle***

In a move designed to address increased operating costs, Airlift Northwest announced today that it will no longer base one of its Lear jets in Ketchikan. Instead, patients needing air medical transport will be served by one of two Lear jets based in either Juneau or Seattle. The change will take place on April 30.

"We are taking this action primarily because of the steep increase in the cost of fuel and the need to dip into our cash reserves to finance replacement of aging aircraft," said Shelly Deering, Director of Alaska Clinical Operations. "As a nonprofit organization, we need to maintain adequate flight volume to cover these costs. In Ketchikan, that volume has not been enough to meet the cost of keeping the base open."

"We will continue to provide the specialty services that form the unique core of Airlift Northwest," she said. "That includes neonatal intensive care, high risk OB, two-pilot/two-nurse teams, and nurses with advanced certification and on-going training. Our level of expertise is among the highest possible in the air medical industry and comparable to a hospital intensive care unit."

Airlift Northwest was founded 25 years ago by Dr. Michael Copass and a consortium of Seattle hospitals to bring high-quality air medical transportation to an underserved area – southeast Alaska. Through a series of enhancements in health care in Alaska, this service gap has been narrowed.

"Some patients who previously needed to be transported to Seattle for appropriate care can now be treated in Alaska," Deering said. "For those critically ill and injured patients who need more specialized care than they can receive in their community, we will respond from Juneau or Seattle."

Deering explained that the health care scene in Alaska, as in other parts of the country, is changing.

"It's especially challenging for nonprofit organizations like Airlift Northwest to cope with escalating costs that aren't paid by private insurance or programs like Medicare or Medicaid," she said. "If the patient can't pay the balance, we absorb that cost as part of our mission to provide service to those who can't afford it. Approximately 40 percent of our transport costs are written off in this way."

Airlift Northwest has been accredited by CAMTS (Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Services) since 1997. It was the first air medical service in Alaska to receive this recognition, which is considered the industry "gold standard." Accreditation means a medical transport service meets a series of industry standards that address issues of patient care and safety.

Airlift Northwest is a nonprofit service founded in 1982 to provide air medical services for critically ill and injured infants, children and adults. Airlift Northwest has bases in Alaska and Washington to serve the Pacific Northwest. More information is available at www.airliftnw.org.