

# Ambulance pioneer saving lives in Middle East

By David Ellery

A Canberra-based international medical services company is bringing first-responder ambulance services to large parts of the United Arab Emirates for the very first time.

An Aspen Medical affiliate, the National Ambulance Company, recently won the contract to provide ambulance services to six of the UAE's seven member emirates.

While the value of the contract is not disclosed, Aspen Medical says it exported \$44 million worth of management expertise, intellectual property and training support in the last financial year.

Aspen co-founder and managing director Glenn Keys said one of the most exciting parts of the latest contract was being able to offer lifesaving services to people who had not had access to them before.

"We are already receiving a fantastic response from the people we are treating and saving and their families," he said.

Until recently only the residents of major cities in the UAE were assured access to a reliable ambulance



service. Some of the emirates had ambulance facilities while others did not.

It is just over six years since the UAE Ministry of Health committed to a major healthcare reform strategy intended to upgrade the level of services available in the northern and less developed part of the country.

The establishment of the National Ambulance Service is a crucial part of that program. It will involve the creation of eight new key ambulance hubs and 22 smaller stations.



**HELP AT HAND:** Paramedics and officials at the launch of the new UAE service, left. Glenn Keys, above.

Twenty state-of-the-art and fully-equipped Mercedes ambulances, staffed by 179 new paramedics – including a number of women – will provide a 24-hour service intended to deliver patients to hospital within 60 minutes of an accident or medical emergency.

"The sooner you can get a patient into a hospital the sooner you can start assessing the condition and assigning a specialist," said Dr Biniam Tesfayohannes, the head of the emergency department at Mafraq Hospital in Abu Dhabi.

Sheikh Saif bin Zayed, a deputy prime minister and minister of the interior, said: "Saving souls is a sacred duty, one that must not lightly be considered."

Calls to the service will be routed through a call centre in Abu Dhabi staffed by 35 bilingual medical operators who will provide services in Arabic and English.

Aspen Medical had been well placed to win the contract thanks to its existing presence in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, since 2012.

"The government of the UAE has shown such a high level of confidence and satisfaction in the pre-hospital service the National Ambulance Company have been providing, that it has been extended across the country," Aspen Medical's chairman, Dr Andrew Walker, said.

Aspen Medical was chosen for the initial ambulance contract over companies from Europe and America.

The company took out the health and biotechnology category at the 51st National Export Awards in Melbourne in November, 2013. It has been named the ACT's exporter of the year three times running.