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Costly air ambulance bills

HIGHLIGHTS
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ISSUE

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONOLULU — A Kauai man is suing his health insurer over a \$36,000 air ambulance bill — a case that illustrates the high costs of emergency air transport, which is essential for people living on the neighbor islands.

On islands where there are limited health care services and specialists, it's common to transport patients to Honolulu on flights.

There are two Hawaii air ambulance providers, but one company charges thousands of dollars more, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported Monday.

Hawaii Life Flight sets its rates at an "industry standard," said Shanon Pollock, vice president of business development for its parent company, Air Medical Resource Group, based in South Jordan, Utah. A Hawaii Life Flight bill for emergency transportation from Hilo to Oahu in December 2013 totaled nearly \$71,000. It listed base rate of about \$16,000 and a mileage charge of about \$54,000.

The same flight on AMR Air Hawaii would be about \$20,000. AMR said it charges a base rate of \$14,000 per flight and \$25 per mile.

Rates skyrocketed after Hawaii Life Flight merged with AirMed Hawaii in 2010, said Speedy Bailey, general manager of AMR, which entered the market in 2013.

Air ambulance companies are required to transport patients regardless of their ability to pay. States are prohibited from regulating air ambulance rates.

Toby Sidlo filed the class-action lawsuit after falling into a bonfire last year during a beach football game. The lawsuit filed in July claims Kaiser is responsible for paying the charges. Doctors decided to fly him to a Honolulu burn care unit for treatment.

Kaiser declined to comment on pending litigation.

State Sen. Josh Green, a Kohala Hospital emergency room doctor, said doctors select the company that can transport the patient the quickest.

"I never favor one over the other based on costs," he said. "I have to make sure the patient doesn't have a tragic outcome."

Air ambulance companies have to charge high rates to make up for their low reimbursement rates from most patients, said the Association of Air Medical Services, based in Virginia.

From lost to found:



Also during August, Big Island Metal Detecting helped another visiting family locate two rings — including a 2.75-carat diamond ring — lost in the water at Keokea Beach Park in North Kohala. PHOTO COURTESY BIG ISLAND METAL DETECTING/SPECIAL TO WEST HAWAII TODAY

PROFESSIONAL 'RING FINDERS' REUNITE OWNERS WITH LOST JEWELRY

MEGHAN MINER
SPECIAL TO WEST HAWAII TODAY

It's perhaps every engaged or married couple's worst nightmare: A vacation or a trip to the beach ruined when a ring — sometimes worth thousands of dollars — goes missing. Yet, in Hawaii, perhaps hundreds of rings are misplaced this way each year, lost at sea after a frolic in the waves or dropped

in the sand when beach towels are moved.

"When people get cold — like when they go in the sea — their hands shrink a little bit," said Kailua-Kona resident Sylvie Madison, who along with husband Brent, operate Big Island Metal Detecting. "If they have a lot of sunscreen on, it's just a recipe for disaster."

After frantic searches that rarely return results, most

owners give up hope of ever seeing their jewelry again. But several metal detecting enthusiasts around the state are offering their services and equipment, and can be commissioned for a targeted search.

The Madisons moved to Hawaii Island from Phuket, Thailand, and began offering metal detecting services a little over two months ago. Their company, Big Island Metal

Detecting, is the only professional company offering such services on Hawaii Island, and is part of an international network of similarly minded metal detecting enthusiasts called The Ring Finders.

The Ring Finders requires its members to have at least one year of metal detecting experience and just four other companies

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Crowds turn out for slack key festival

BY LAURA SHIMABUKU
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The 23rd annual Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Festival took place on Sunday at the Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay. The lineup included notable artists such as LT Smooth, John Keawe, Brother Noland Keale and more.

Slack key lovers braved the heat and threat of rain to listen to the smooth sounds of guitar and ukulele carry through the air.

For information about the "Kona Style" Festival, visit slackkeyfestival.com.



Guests find a shadey place to sit and listen to the 23rd Annual Hawaiian Slack Key Guitar Festival Sunday at the Sheraton Kona Resort and Spa at Keauhou Bay.



Brother Noland jams at the Festival Sunday. Photos by LAURA SHIMABUKU/WEST HAWAII TODAY

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