KEEPING SAFE AND SECURE IN ANTARCTICA



© © Doctor Jacques Richon performing a training evacuation exercise (International Polar Foundation)

There are a lot of things that can happen in Antarctica, but when it comes to medical emergencies, it can mean the difference between life and death

Like everywhere in Antarctica, there are many risks to manage for the scientists and crew who stay at and near Princess Elisabeth. The station is on a glacier, there are hidden crevasses, there is always the risk of accident when driving or even sitting on snowmobiles and whenever the station is under maintenance or construction

That’s why it’s so important to have someone like Jacques Richon at Princess Elisabeth. Jacques is a veteran Swiss doctor who ensures the good health of everyone who stays at the station. He’s ready on standby to provide medical aid whenever it’s needed. But he also avoids problems by giving the stations residents safety training and briefings.

Luckily, there have never been any serious injuries so far, but Jacques is the kind of doctor you want if something goes really wrong. Because if serious medical aid is needed, it’s only available in Cape Town, about 5000 km away.

Not just any doctor can treat frostbite induced gangrene, which is no problem for Jacques because he has the know how, Zen like mental control and strong stomach needed to treat extreme injuries in extreme locations.

And if he needs assistance, it's no problem because Jacques has ringed himself with expert advice through a network of colleagues from different disciplines who are a mere satellite phone call away.

This is already Jacques 8th time at Princess Elisabeth, but one of his goals this season is to develop and test a tele-medicine procedure with a hospital in Switzerland (Hôpital du Valais) and GRIMM (Groupe d'Intervention Médicale en Montagne). This will not only be useful in Antarctica, but for anyone needing medical assistance in remote locations.

Jacques also trains the stations residents learning crevasse rescue and rescue in challenging environments.

And just in case, he can even fly a helicopter.

Doctor Richon talking about his work