

BROADCAST-OSF Doctor Provides Service to Patients and His Country

Dr. Josh Carpenter, a hospitalist at OSF HealthCare St. Mary's Medical Center in Galesburg did not ring in 2020 toasting with champagne, blowing horns, or watching the ball drop in Times Square on TV.

That's because Dr. Carpenter not only serves patients at OSF St. Mary's but Medical Center, but he serves the country on a regular basis with the Illinois National Guard. He's a flight surgeon at the 182nd Medical Group for Peoria Air National Guard, where for nearly 20 years, he's been providing care to the country's aviators and airmen.

This Christmas and New Year's, Dr. Carpenter was deployed in Southeast Asia where he was recognized for his service by the commander of a military hospital. While his unit is like an extended family, it has still been a challenge to be so far away from his wife Alison and their young son Knox.

This is the third deployment for the Galesburg native. During his first trip overseas in 2016, Dr. Carpenter was based in Kuwait and traveled to Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar and Egypt. His second deployment was to Poland.

Dr. Carpenter left for his latest deployment just before Halloween. Before his departure, he explained he didn't relish the idea of being away from Alison and his young son Knox during the holidays, but Carpenter said he wants to set an example for him.

SOT-Dr. Carpenter, Hospitalist at OSF HealthCare St. Mary Medical Center

“My hope is that some of that he picks up on some of that sacrifice. I want him to have some of that same sense of responsibility for those around him that I feel and so I feel the only way that you can give that to your son is by showing it to him. So, I'm hoping he picks up on some of that through his life.”

Carpenter's wife is a medical administrator for the 182nd and so Carpenter says while it has been difficult to be away, Alison understands service and is supportive of him.

As the chief of aerospace medicine, Carpenter implemented a quality assurance program for 182 medical group, Illinois National Guard in Peoria. He is responsible for advising wing command as well as providing medical services for military personnel while in the field. Even on long flights, simple things can become a serious medical issue.

SOT-Dr. Carpenter, Hospitalist at OSF HealthCare St. Mary Medical Center

“When you've got someone who's flying for potentially 16 hours, they tend to want to get dehydrated and in that environment, that can be sort of a disastrous plan.”

Dr. Carpenter says he has worked on a conditioning regime to help get aviators and fighter pilots ready for what they could face – everything from significant G-forces on the body, hypoxia, or lack of oxygen in the bloodstream, to stress from battle or having to be hyper vigilant for long periods.

But, when it comes to diagnosing and treating ailments, Carpenter has to rely on his training. He says it's not unlike working in rural health care when a specialist might be dozens of miles away and you don't always have immediate access to the most state-of-the-art labs or diagnostic equipment.

SOT-Dr. Carpenter, Hospitalist at OSF HealthCare St. Mary Medical Center

“So you’ve got to be able to rely on your diagnostic skills and your medical decision-making to know I need to treat this first because this is a potentially lethal illness or this is what would cause the disability.” He adds, “You may not have an X-ray or even a blood test you want to order but you have to figure out how you’re going to get a patient treated and get them back in the fight.”

Carpenter is gearing up and excited for his return home next week. He says while his unit is like extended family and they made the best of being away from family and friends for the holidays, he's looking forward to a belated celebration and returning to patients at OSF St. Mary Medical Center.

Dr. Carpenter is a Distinguished Graduate from Commissioned Officer Training and has received the Air Force Achievement Medal, the Gary Button MD Rural Primary Care Award and he's a member of the Gold Foundation's Humanism Honor Society.