

Case Study:

Managed Repatriation Following Acute Coronary Syndrome on Lipari

Service line: Medical Case Management & Doctor-and-Nurse Escorted Repatriation
Region: Lipari, Italy → London, United Kingdom
Patient profile: 50-year-old female, holidaying on Lipari

Overview

A 50-year-old woman developed acute coronary syndrome (ACS) while holidaying on the island of Lipari. Local capability on the island extended to GP review and ECG, but there was no suitable facility for higher-level cardiac care. Despite this, the patient repeatedly declined the advised transfer to a higher-level facility on mainland Italy, preferring instead to return directly to the UK. Our team was engaged to manage her case over an extended period, ultimately delivering a safe, doctor-and-nurse escorted repatriation once it was clinically appropriate to do so.

The Challenge

This case required sustained clinical judgement over an extended timeframe, rather than a single rapid response:

Limited local cardiac capability:

Lipari offered only GP review and ECG, with no facility able to provide higher-level cardiac care should the patient's condition escalate.

Patient declining recommended care:

The patient repeatedly declined the advised transfer to a higher-level facility in Italy, creating an ongoing tension between clinical recommendation and patient preference that had to be carefully and respectfully managed.

An unsafe window for travel:

With the patient remaining symptomatic, repatriation could not proceed immediately, as travelling — particularly by commercial means — carried real clinical risk while her condition remained active.

Extended case management:

Rather than a single decision point, this case required close, ongoing monitoring over several weeks to track the patient's condition and determine when, if ever, safe transfer became possible.

A defensible clinical decision point:

Any decision to proceed with repatriation needed to be based on clear clinical evidence — not simply patient preference or elapsed time — and required sign-off at the appropriate clinical level.

Safe delivery into definitive care:

Once repatriation was appropriate, the plan still needed to ensure the patient moved seamlessly from escorted travel into further cardiac investigation and management on arrival in the UK.

Why It Mattered

Not every case can, or should, be resolved quickly — sometimes the safest and most responsible course of action is to wait, monitor closely, and move only when the clinical evidence supports it. This case demonstrates the value of genuine, sustained case management: respecting a patient's own wishes, maintaining rigorous clinical oversight over an extended period, making a defensible, evidence-based decision on timing, and ensuring every element of the journey home — right through to hospital admission — was arranged in advance for a safe and seamless outcome.

Outcome

The patient was ultimately returned safely to the UK once — and only once — it was clinically appropriate to do so, supported throughout by close case management, a clear evidence-based decision process, and a fully pre-arranged reception into UK hospital care.

Our Response

1. Initial Case Assessment

On notification, our team reviewed the patient's diagnosis of acute coronary syndrome and the limitations of the local facility on Lipari, establishing from the outset that higher-level cardiac care was not available locally should it be needed.

2. Respecting Patient Choice While Managing Risk

When the patient repeatedly declined transfer to a higher-level facility in Italy, our team worked within her wishes while being clear about the associated risks, and continued to manage her case closely rather than proceeding with repatriation while she remained symptomatic.

3. Deferred Repatriation and Ongoing Monitoring

Repatriation was deliberately deferred for as long as the patient remained symptomatic. Over several weeks, our team maintained close case management, tracking her clinical progress and ensuring she continued to receive appropriate local review throughout.

4. Clinical Evidence-Based Decision to Proceed

A decision to move forward with repatriation was made only once a defined symptom-free period had been achieved and confirmed by a repeat ECG. This clinical evidence directly informed the Chief Medical Officer's decision to proceed with a doctor-and-nurse escorted return, ensuring the move was clinically justified rather than simply driven by the passage of time.

5. Pre-Arranged Reception at Heathrow

Before the patient departed Lipari, our team arranged for a blue-light ambulance to meet the escort team on arrival at London Heathrow, ensuring the next stage of her care was fully organised in advance rather than arranged reactively on landing.

6. Multi-Stage Doctor-and-Nurse Escorted Journey

Given Lipari's island location, the journey home involved several distinct stages, each requiring continuity of the same clinical escort. The patient was transported by ambulance to the ferry terminal, crossed by ferry to Sicily, continued onward to Catania, and then took a commercial flight to London Heathrow — accompanied throughout by both the doctor and the nurse. This continuous escort across each mode of transport ensured consistent clinical oversight and the ability to respond immediately should any issue arise at any stage of the journey.

7. Seamless Handover into UK Hospital Care

On arrival at Heathrow, the waiting blue-light ambulance transferred the patient directly to a London hospital for admission, further investigation, and ongoing management, ensuring a smooth, uninterrupted transition from escorted travel into definitive cardiac care.

Key outcomes:

- Patient's condition closely monitored and managed over several weeks despite an initially unsafe window for travel
- Patient's own preferences respected throughout, while risk was continuously and carefully managed
- Repatriation decision grounded in clear clinical evidence — a defined symptom-free period and a repeat ECG — and formally approved by the Chief Medical Officer
- Safe, continuously supervised doctor-and-nurse escorted journey across multiple stages — ambulance, ferry, and commercial flight — from Lipari to London Heathrow
- Blue-light ambulance pre-arranged and waiting on arrival, ensuring no delay in the transfer to hospital
- Seamless handover into a London hospital for further investigation and ongoing cardiac management

This case study has been anonymised to protect patient confidentiality. Details reflect the general nature of the case and the services provided.