



The Times/CHRISTOBAL PEREZ

Dr. John Knight says a defibrillator like this could have helped save a woman who went into cardiac arrest and died on an airline flight on which he was a passenger. Five U.S. carriers have agreed to put defibrillators on their planes.

# Doctor pushes airlines to add medical equipment

■ Shreveporter appears on 'Good Morning America' today.

By NITA BIRMINGHAM  
The Times

Imagine knowing how to save the life of a 25-year-old woman suffering cardiac arrest but watching her die because of a lack of proper medical equipment.

That's what happened to Shreveport surgeon Dr. John Knight last December on a Delta flight. A frustrated

Knight has since become an active proponent for better life-saving equipment on airplanes and improved medical training for flight attendants.

He took his story to one of the nation's major newspapers, The Washington Post. Crews from a Toronto television magazine show and *Good Morning America* interviewed him; the *GMA* segment is scheduled to air today on KTBS-3. A crew from the TV magazine show *Extra* will be in town Wednesday to interview Knight.

Knight doesn't consider himself an activist but said he was willing to go to great lengths to prevent a recur-

rence of his experience.

"It's gotten some attention, and that's what I wanted," he said.

Knight apparently has done more than attract media attention. His concern and involvement helped move the federal Aviation Medical Assistance Act through the legislative process, said Jim Coon of the House Aviation Subcommittee. The act is awaiting the president's signature.

The act requires major air carriers to report on-board medical incidents to the Federal Aviation Administration for a year, Coon said. The FAA then will determine what med-

ical equipment should be added on airplanes.

The FAA's requirements for medical kits today are the same as they were in 1986, with the exception of the addition of latex gloves, according to the subcommittee. Kits are supposed to include a stethoscope, blood pressure monitoring device, three sizes of airway tubes and drugs for allergic reactions.

Coon expects Knight's medical kit recommendations to be heard when the FAA evaluates the data it collects. Knight already has drafted a list; it includes a defibrillator and advanced airway equipment. The

kit would equal the cost of two first-class airline tickets, he said.

Coon said five U.S. carriers — including Delta — already have voluntarily agreed to put defibrillators on their planes. A defibrillator uses an electric shock to restore normal heart rhythm.

"I think as a result of Dr. Knight's experience, the associated publicity and the knowledge that there was potential need for this, a lot of the airlines went ahead and fast-forwarded their effort," said Rep. John Cooksey, R-La.

■ See LOCAL 2A



# Local doctor will appear on GMA today

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The Aviation Medical Assistance Act also directs the FAA to re-evaluate flight attendant training and contains a "good Samaritan" clause to protect the airline and passenger against liability when a passenger provides assistance in medical emergencies.

Knight said passage of the bill has brought closure to a stressful experience that affected him and his family. Knight's wife and children, ages 9 and 11, watched as he struggled to resuscitate Lashann Royal of Deerfield Beach, Fla.

The flight to Miami had started as

a fun family vacation to "one of the few warm places around Christmas," Knight said. He stored his laptop computer as the plane started its descent. Then a call for a medical doctor went out over the intercom.

"They didn't say there's a medical emergency, but they're not calling you to serve coffee," Knight said.

Knight stepped forward and found Royal lying in the aisle. Her color was bad, and she wasn't breathing, but nobody was doing cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Knight started CPR and soon was joined by a paramedic. He did chest compressions while Knight blew air into

Royal's lungs.

Knight told a flight attendant he needed oxygen. The attendant pointed to a "little wimpy bottle of oxygen" with a mask similar to the ones attendants demonstrate in preflight instructions.

Knight needed something to force air into the woman's chest and a breathing tube, which also would protect her from choking if she regurgitated during CPR, which she eventually did. Attendants gave him what looked like a "little Band-Aid kit" marked to be opened only by a physician. Knight said he had to stop CPR to open it because the attendants wouldn't. The kit contained a tube

just long enough to reach the back of the mouth but not down the airway.

"I looked in there and said, 'This is crazy, this is absurd,'" Knight said.

Royal died despite the efforts of Knight and the paramedic. Doctors said she had a heart abnormality.

Knight later found out Royal was single and worked as a secretary. She'd been on a religious retreat with her family. Her relatives had gone home, but Royal wanted to stay at the retreat another day, Knight said.

Knight got a letter of appreciation from Royal's family.

"They sent a picture of her. She was beautiful, just beautiful," he said.