

Sick US South Pole scientist flown to New Zealand

October 18 2011

A US scientist stranded in Antarctica for almost two months following a suspected stroke has been evacuated from the South Pole to New Zealand in a hazardous airlift.

Renee-Nicole Douceur spoke of her relief after arriving in the South Island city of Christchurch on Monday night. Television pictures showed a tired but upbeat Douceur making her own way through the airport after the flight.

The 58-year-old scientist said she was pleased to have completed the flights without suffering further health complications.

"Coming from the South Pole on the unpressurised plane, I was worried about whether it could do some more serious damage or a stroke or who knows what else," Douceur told TVNZ.

"They kept the plane at very low altitudes, the air crew know what to do if something happened to me."

Douceur is believed to have suffered a stroke at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station in late August, complaining of temporary [vision loss](#) and difficulty speaking.

But the harsh [Antarctic winter](#), where temperatures can plunge to -60 Celsius (-72 Fahrenheit), meant an immediate evacuation was impossible.

With conditions easing on the frozen continent over the weekend, reports said a cargo plane set off for Antarctica on Saturday, landing briefly at Britain's Rothera base before heading to South Pole and picking up Douceur.

Accompanied by a medic, she was then taken to the US McMurdo base and transferred to a US C-17 Globemaster, which completed the trip to Christchurch, the reports said.

Douceur was expected to undergo scans and medical assessments Tuesday to try to determine the exact nature of her condition.

The [rescue mission](#) is reportedly the earliest flight after winter to the [South Pole](#) since US doctor Jerri Nielsen FitzGerald was airlifted out in 1999 after diagnosing and treating her own [breast cancer](#) for five months.

Officials with the US Antarctic program in Christchurch refused to comment, referring all inquiries to their head office in the United States and Douceur's employer Raytheon Polar Services.

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