

It is of great concern to the Committee of SPUMS that the AMA, often erroneously referred to as the Doctors' Trade Union, is putting the financial interests of some of its members before the good of all our patients. The comparison with pilots' medicals is flawed because these have been restricted, for over 30 years, to a list of approved doctors, which is what SPUMS is asking for diving medicals. That only in the last few years has the relevant government body decided that it may be necessary to require training in aviation medicine to be on the list shows that SPUMS has more interest in the safety of divers than the government has had in the safety of pilots and their passengers.

We need to get the AMA to move with the times and uphold the good name of medicine and its ideals of putting the patient first. I want SPUMS members and associates to write to the Federal AMA and their State branch. Ask the AMA to put patients first and support the SPUMS view that diving medicals should be done by doctors with training in underwater medicine. A simple way of doing this would be to photocopy this article, add your name and address and send it off.

John Knight
Editor, SPUMS Journal
SPUMS representative to Standards Australia

Reference

- 1 Edmonds C. MMM, the Mickey Mouse Medical. SPUMS J 1986; 16 (1): 3-4

RESORT SCUBA COURSES IN QUEENSLAND: NUMBERS AND COSTS

Jeffrey Wilks

Background

Each year thousands of people have their first scuba diving experience on the Great Barrier Reef. Introductory or resort scuba courses are easy to conduct and are generally very satisfying for both the customer and the instructor. Resort divers say they expect to see coral and fish on their first dive, and later report that they particularly enjoyed the colour and beauty observed underwater. Some, or it may be many, follow up their initial scuba experience with a formal open water course to become certified divers.

While resort courses are generally safe, by virtue of students being closely supervised at all times by a certified instructor, some legitimate concerns have been raised about the current method of determining students' fitness to dive. Concern about variability in teaching standards have re-

cently been addressed by PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) through the introduction of a standardized instructional system for resort programs. It is hoped that this will help solve the problems.

However, any objective discussion about resort courses is still hampered by a general lack of empirical data. For example, the number of resort dives conducted in Queensland each year is not known, and only one small study has examined customer perceptions of their introductory diving experience. There is also no reliable data on the morbidity or mortality of the resort course.

Instructors are the critical factor how resort courses are conducted. In order to discuss resort programs it is first necessary to gather some basic information about these courses. The present study sought this information from the people who provide the service.

Methods

Two hundred and two registered Queensland scuba instructors, representing all four Australian training agencies, participated in the study. NAUI (National Association of Underwater Instructors) members were recruited through a direct mail-out from Australian headquarters, along with a letter of the organisation's support for the project. PADI, SSI (Scuba Schools International) and NASDS (National Association of Scuba Diving Schools) instructors were recruited through personal visits to retail shops, phone calls and informal networking. The final sample contained full-time (57%) and part-time (43%) instructors. The various employment categories were, owners and managers (27%), salaried staff (39%), and independent instructors (34%). Figures from the training agencies indicate that there were 616 certified instructors in Queensland at the time of this study, so the sample represents 33% of Queensland instructors.

All instructors completed a 16-page confidential questionnaire covering a range of topics related to their work in the dive industry. Instructors were asked if they ran introductory or resort courses as part of their current job. Those who did run these courses were asked to report on approximately how many students they personally supervised in the past 12 months, and also the price they charged for a resort course. Finally, instructors were asked if the courses they ran included a separate pool training session.

Results

One hundred and forty six instructors (72% of the sample) reported that they conducted introductory or resort course scuba programs. Table 1 show the number of resort students personally supervised by the instructors in the past 12 months. Seventy two, almost half the sample (49%),

supervised less than 50 resort students in the year. Twenty two instructors (15%) supervised 50-100 students, 17 (12%) supervised 101-120 students and 20 (14%) supervised more than 500 students a year. One instructor commented that he had supervised (and logged) more than 1,000 resort dives in the previous year.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF RESORT COURSE DIVERS

Divers supervised	Number of instructors	%	Mid-point	Student totals
Less than 50	72	49	25	1,800
50-100	22	15	75	1,650
101-200	17	12	150	2,550
201-300	6	4	250	1,500
301-400	6	4	350	2,100
401-500	3	2	450	1,350
More than 500	20	14	600	12,000
	146			22,950

Table 1 also indicates the mid-point number to best represent the average number of students each instructors supervised. While some specific detail was lost in using categories, pilot studies had shown that asking instructors to report exact numbers would pose difficulties. Based on the mid-point, and the number of instructors reporting students at each level, the final column in Table 1 shows the likely student totals. Together these instructors provided a resort scuba experience for an estimated 22,950 students.

Table 2 shows the cost of the courses conducted and the number and percentage of instructors who reported charging the corresponding price at each level. Costs ranged from \$20 to \$ 265, the average (mean) price for a resort course in Queensland was \$67. The mode (most frequently reported price) was \$60. Almost two-thirds (62%) of the resort courses included a separate pool training session.

Using the estimated total of 22,950 students total revenue generated from these students was \$1,414,950.00. This figure is the product of student numbers (mid-point) by course cost, calculated for each instructor separately, then summed for the full sample. Pro-rata, this figure suggests that approximately \$ 4.2 million is generated by resort courses each year in the State. A current industry study, still in progress, tends to support these figures. Based on 80 Queensland companies supplying their figures for 1991 a total of 65,000 resort dives have been recorded. At an average price of \$60 per dive this represents a revenue of

\$3.9 million. Several large companies specialising in resort courses have still to submit their returns so the above figure of \$4.2 million is considered to be reasonably accurate.

TABLE 2

COST OF RESORT COURSES

Cost	Number of instructors	%
< \$25	5	3
\$25-30	20	14
\$31-40	14	10
\$41-50	30	21
\$51-60	31	21
\$61-70	4	3
\$71-80	14	10
\$81-90	4	3
\$91-100	7	5
\$100-150	10	7
> \$150	7	5

The present study shows that, in financial terms, resort courses contribute substantially to the Queensland recreational diving industry. From the only other empirical study available, resort divers report a high level of satisfaction with their introductory scuba experience. Although resort courses are considered safe, there is little reliable data on accidents that have occurred. Accident data needs to be made available so that steps can be taken to avoid problems in the future. The quality of service being offered also remains to be investigated. With so many people taking their first resort dive each year the industry needs to guarantee that the experience will be safe and enjoyable.

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Dr Jeffrey Wilks, PhD, is a Psychologist and Tourism Research Fellow, Key Centre in Strategic Management, Queensland University of Technology, GPO Box 2434, Brisbane, Queensland 4001, Australia.