

sports-related injuries should be made aware of this, be under the care of appropriately trained medical staff and ideally be willing to participate in controlled trials to assess the efficacy of such treatment. At present, the only facilities in a position to do this are the hospital-based facilities in co-operation with those trained in Sports Medicine or related medical practice.

Dr Michael Bennett
Secretary, ANZHMG
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MEDICAL SUPPORT FOR DIVING OPERATIONS: TRAINING THE ON-CALL DOCTOR

David Elliott

All diving activities need medical support, not only in case there is a medical emergency but also for routine cover, in particular for the assessment of fitness to return to diving after some illness or injury. Arrangements for the provision of medical cover vary around the world but usually there is a local medical service which responds to the local need and this is supported by a distant and more experienced medical service providing consultant advice when it is required. There are many different ways in which these medical services are provided but, whatever their organisation, accountability, resources and regulatory constraints, the supreme need is for the competency of the diving doctor on call.

Even the phrase "diving doctor" can be inappropriate because many diving doctors do not dive. A few may be recreational scuba divers and even fewer may have had commercial or naval mixed gas training but the majority are occupational or family doctors who have no need to dive. Attendance at a one-week introductory course is more than is required in most countries. In contrast, for those who are on-call and responsible for providing medical care in a diving emergency, there are no national requirements and few courses, but specific and appropriate training is essential. For those doctors who not only treat diving illnesses but also advise diving companies or government agencies on aspects of diving health and safety, the opportunities to learn the important subtleties of diving physiology are few.

The Diving Medical Specialist must have received some practical training in order to understand the underwater working environment and its medical emergencies. At an intermediate level, while gaining experience under a consultant, the essential medical skills are those of managing the various medical emergencies in diving. At the consultant level, additional skills include

applied physiology, understanding decompression theory and reviewing aspects of operational diving, for example assessing modifications to underwater breathing apparatus. Competencies need to include experience of treating difficult diving incidents and the ability to use applied physiology in the assessment of the divers' working environment and all associated equipment. A postgraduate qualification in occupational medicine is an appropriate foundation for this training but, in practice, accreditation in a major clinical speciality has also proved suitable.

A two-week course is a minimum introduction to this subject and must be supplemented by appropriate and sufficient experience. To complete their training, such doctors should be fit to dive and they must maintain this fitness for compression chamber work for as long as they continue to treat diving casualties.

The first course to focus upon the medical needs of commercial diving was organised in Italy by Shell in 1975. Since then there have been a number of advanced courses in Europe of two weeks or longer to give doctors practical training appropriate for providing emergency medical cover for air and mixed gas diving.

Another such international course is planned and will take place in Fremantle in October 1996. Open to doctors from all corners of the world this course will be the first to be located geographically convenient for those in Asia, Australia and around the Pacific rim. The theme of the first week (30 Sep to 4 Oct) is working dives to 50 metres and that of the second week (7 to 11 Oct, 1996) is working dives deeper than 50 metres. The courses will have practical sessions which, with the support of local and international diving companies and the Fremantle Hyperbaric Unit, will include in-water training and simulated emergencies.

Details are available from Professor David Elliott or from Biomedical Seminars, 7 Lyncroft Gardens, Ewell, Surrey KT17 1UR, England. Fax (44) 181 786 7036. Also see the advertisement on page 264

YET ANOTHER FUSS ABOUT (PROBABLY) NOTHING.

Des Gorman

As much of the Australasian media-attentive population are aware, there has been yet another media release of a study showing that diving, even in the absence of decompression illness (DCI) is injurious to your health. The specific study alluded to here was from a German group and published in the British journal called The