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THE WORLD AS IT IS

DOCTORS DO IT DEEPER

Harry Oxer

An international group of doctors were given the opportunity to find out how the off-shore occupational diver (who used to be known as a commercial diver) lives and works, at a recent course held at the Fremantle Hospital Hyperbaric Medicine Unit in Western Australia. "Bennett and Elliott" came to Australia and worked with the Hyperbaric Medicine Unit in Fremantle Hospital, in October 1996 to conduct the two week course entitled "Medical Support of Commercial Diving". Its aims were to introduce specialist doctors to the working environment and tasks of working divers. The participants discussed the particular aspects of physics, physiology, and medicine associated with the work of many different groups of working divers.

Fremantle offered unique opportunities because of its excellent relationship with the commercial diving and

other organisations as well as the Hyperbaric Unit's own facilities for chamber experience and dry dives. The students, who came from Australia and nine other countries, were able to visit Coflexip Stena Offshore's dive support vessel the "CSO Venturer" and look at the saturation diving system and hyperbaric lifeboat on that vessel. Dave Jenkins, Coflexip Safety Officer shared his expertise with the class. Pat Washington and Bill Wallace from Oceaneering Australia came to Fremantle and lectured, drawing on their vast experience in the commercial diving field. Craig Roberts of Subsea International lectured and also arranged a visit to the Subsea facility to examine in detail their vertical chamber transportable saturation system, a dive bell and a hyperbaric lifeboat. The class also examined a large ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle).

Contract Diving Australia made available diving experience using commercial diving equipment. Dusty Miller told the class about the equipment and supervised the diving. All members dived, using Kirby Band Masks, an extended full-face mask with gas supply and communications built in which is held in place by a zip up



Dr David Griffiths, Director of the Hyperbaric Medicine Unit in Townsville, after a dive. His Kirby-Morgan Band Mask is face-down at his feet. Further down the jetty Professor Elliott acts as tender for another diver.

hood and octopus straps, and commercial gear, at the excellent recreational dive training facility belonging to Perth Diving Academy. Dives were also made in the harbour, carrying out examples of underwater tasks, such as using pneumatic and hydraulic tools. Non-divers used the Perth Diving Academy training pool, and two who had never been underwater before dived successfully to 3 m in commercial gear. They found this a valuable experience in understanding the commercial diver's work environment.

The International Foundation for Accident Prevention (IFAP) put participants through its helicopter escape training operation. Some of the participants had to jump from 4 m into Fremantle Harbour, on a wind chilling day, right and board a large life raft. The group also visited the Submarine Escape Training Tower at the Royal Australian Navy Base at HMAS Stirling.

All the trainees felt that they had benefited greatly, gaining an understanding of the way in which the working diver earns a living. Ken from Canada found that he had to come all the way to Fremantle to find out what being cold in the water really was!

Professor David Elliott's course is well recognised throughout the world as the definitive course. This is the first time it has been run outside Europe and outside the Northern Hemisphere. Another group of doctors now have a greater understanding of the environment and the tasks of the diver's work.

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DIVING SAFETY IN QUEENSLAND: SOME OBSERVATIONS

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Key Words

Decompression illness, safety, tourism.

Introduction

In recent years there have been several attempts to quantify the number of dives made annually off the Queensland coast, particularly dives on the Great Barrier Reef. Some efforts have provided detailed methodology,^{1,2} while in other published reports it is unclear how a final figure was obtained.³⁻⁶

A useful contribution to this developing data base is the new market research report by Windsor.⁷ He suggests that there were 1,290,500 dives undertaken on the Great Barrier Reef during 1994. While rounding of figures to the nearest 500 or 1000 throughout the report indicates that the calculations are largely approximations, the study nevertheless provides a valuable baseline for examining diving safety in Queensland during that period. Only by linking diving numbers to injury reports can overall rates of safety be determined.⁸

In a study just completed,⁹ we examined medical records to determine the numbers and principal diagnoses of tourists admitted to Queensland hospitals during the financial year 1993/1994. Following the recommendation of Walker and her colleagues, that tourist health research should target hospitals at the major tourist destinations in Queensland,¹⁰ we chose to study seven regional hospitals in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Proserpine, Rockhampton, Nambour and the Gold Coast. These facilities were chosen because they are the main hospitals in each of Queensland's major coastal tourist destinations, as identified by the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation.¹¹