

STIRRING THE POSSUM - UK STYLE

PO Box 120
Narrabeen
New South Wales 2101
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Dear Editor

The ancient art of "stirring the possum" is far from dead. It has recently been resuscitated in the UK in the guise of *Pressure Point*, a news sheet produced by Dr Ian Sibley-Calder.

Having been fortunate enough to receive copies of the first two issues, I can confirm that this Editor has jumped into the dangerous arena of questioning, where diving medical orthodoxy seeks to make questioners ashamed to proclaim their doubts, refuses them publication opportunities, or tries to drown them with indifference and silence. Government Departments are not the only places which practice a policy of quietly ignoring correspondence on matters they do not wish to admit require a reasoned response.

In its first issue *Pressure Point* states that its aim is to encourage ongoing education, debate, and discussion in the fields of diving and hyperbaric medicine. There will be an attempt to review articles and gather stories, particularly those of an interesting or controversial nature. The first issue raises the matter of whether "obesity" (those with a BMI > 30) should automatically be regarded as reason to refuse a "fit-to-dive" certificate to a commercial diver. Remember, this is a UK publication and there the medical examination system for occupational divers is more advanced than in Australia, having a medical committee to deal with all appeals where a professional diver feels the "fail" decision to be unjust.

As readers will realise, the BMI is a crude measure indeed and should not be treated as the sole criterion of health. The author asks for correspondence, a request which deserves a good response. There are also brief references to the possible benefits of exercise during decompression, a no-no by present beliefs if ever there was one. As this is a report of an article by Dr Jankowski¹ in *Undersea and Hyperbaric Medicine* it should not be too readily discounted. An additional borrowing from *Undersea and Hyperbaric Medicine* records the work by Edge, Grieve, Gibbons et al. with diabetic divers.² This is a subject which is not discussed here in Australia. Finally, there is a brief commentary by Dr David Elliott on the resumption of diving after a diving incident. It will be interesting to read the papers presented at the UHMS meeting on this topic, held at Cozumel in 1997, when it is published.

The second issue was no less informative, including a reference to the use of hyperbaric treatment where a Jehovah's Witness refused transfusion despite critical anaemia from antepartum haemorrhage. This is especially interesting in view of a current case being appealed to the High Court of Australia³ where the husband reluctantly gave assent to a transfusion after three days and everyone even remotely involved is being sued by the fully recovered patient and other cases,^{4,5} where the patient's wishes were granted and deaths resulted. There are brief notes about exploding teeth, a problem which can affect commercial divers while welding underwater, and comments about the diving methods chosen for the search to find and recover fragments of the TWA plane which crashed off Long Island a few years ago. The poor caisson workers get a mention too, with the comment that modern tunnelling methods have reduced their risks, but also their employment chances.

The further issues of this news sheet are awaited with interest. There do not seem enough Holy Cows left to identify for slaughter to support a long publishing life, but there probably are!

Readers are encouraged to contact Dr Ian Sibley-Calder at Westfield, Westwood Avenue, Hornsea, East Riding, HY18 IEE, UK, for details of how to subscribe to *Pressure Point*. For those who have out of date atlases, East Riding was part of Yorkshire in the days before I moved to Australia.

Douglas Walker

References

- 1 Jankowski LW, Nishi RY, Eaton DJ and Griffin AP. Exercise during decompression reduces the amount of venous gas emboli. *Undersea Hyperbaric Med* 1997; 24 (2): 59-65
- 2 Edge CJ, Grieve AP, Gibbons N, O'Sullivan and Bryson P. Control of blood glucose in a group of diabetic scuba divers. *Undersea Hyperbaric Med* 1997; 24 (3): 201-207
- 3 *The Australian* 1998; Nov 24: 1,2
- 4 *The Australian* 1998; Aug 22: 2,4
- 5 *The Australian* 1998; Dec 11: 1,15
- 6 *The Australian* 1998; Nov 26: 3
- 7 *The Australian* 1998; Dec 1: 12,15

Key Words

Letter, underwater medicine.