

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RECREATIONAL DIVING MEDICALS

Department of Medicine
Cairns Base Hospital
2000/5/22

Dear Editor,

We were grateful to read your editorial comment on our recent paper on the diving medical examination in practice published in the Medical Journal of Australia.¹ Your comments were somewhat at variance from those of the President of SPUMS who wrote an editorial in the same issue of the Medical Journal of Australia² which was fairly critical of our paper. It was perhaps unfortunate that Dr Walker did not declare her conflict of interest as President of SPUMS and also that she suggested that our data showed that "most doctors avoided making the "wrong" decision by being more conservative than the Australian standards".

In fact, as you correctly pointed out, our data showed exactly the opposite with most of the responses which differed from AS4005.1-1992 being in favour of allowing the diver to dive. Dr Walker comes out pretty strongly in her editorial in the MJA for continuing the status quo. Again, as you correctly point out in your editorial, the official position of SPUMS adopted in 1995 at the Fiji Annual Scientific Meeting is as we outlined with emphasis on education, risk assessment and informed consent.

The sad fact is that 5 years after having come to this conclusion SPUMS has done nothing whatsoever to make this a reality and the President of SPUMS is still going into print putting forward the contrary view.

Perhaps it is time for SPUMS to make a clear and unequivocal statement as to what the official policy is and preferably publish this somewhere like the Medical Journal of Australia as a first move to implementing the decisions taken in 1995 and improving the current and unsatisfactory situation.

Graham Simpson
Clinical Associate Professor
University of Queensland
Director of Thoracic Medicine

David Roomes
Medical Registrar

References

- 1 Simpson G and Roomes D. Scuba diving medical examinations in practice: a postal survey. *Med J Aust* 1999; 171: 595-598
- 2 Walker R. Water hazards. *Med J Aust* 1999; 171: 584-586

Key Words

Fitness to dive, letter, medical standards.

The above letter was forwarded to Dr Robyn Walker for her reply which is printed below.

2000/7/14

Dear Editor

The letter from Drs Simpson and Roomes suggests that a conflict of interest arises if the President of SPUMS comments on matters relating to diving safety. Surely that is an accepted role for the President of a Society which exists to promote and facilitate the study of all aspects of underwater medicine. The Medical Journal of Australia was aware of my role as President of SPUMS. The fact that they did not publish this I can only interpret as acceptance that this did not pose an ethical problem.

Medical standards may be considered by some to be black and white, however, patients come in shades of grey. I believe it is entirely reasonable for practitioners to further investigate, refer, or seek expert advice on individuals fitness to dive. The data¹ shows that on initial assessment most respondents did not pass an individual fit to dive.

To certify that a person is fit to undertake any form of diving requires that individual to be physically fit, medically healthy and psychologically stable. Many doctors limit their consultation to the exclusion of disease rather than undertaking a comprehensive assessment based upon their knowledge of different marine environments, range of diving equipment, diving gas mixtures to be used and the skills required to ensure the diver's safety. I fully support a system where practitioners provide an assessment and risk evaluation based on the above criteria. However, it is unfortunate that the great majority of Australian doctors do not have this training or experience and therefore rely on the proscriptive guidelines as detailed in the Australian Standards.

SPUMS is an advisory and not a regulatory body. The Society will continue to lobby for improved training in diving medicine for medical practitioners, but can not take responsibility for determinations of regulatory agencies.

Robyn Walker
President of SPUMS

Reference

- 1 Simpson G and Roomes D. Scuba diving medical examinations in practice: a postal survey. *Med J Aust* 1999; 171 (11/12): 595-598

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Fitness to dive, letter, medical standards.