

aesthesia practice presented at a meeting of the Faculty of Anaesthetists. Perhaps SPUMS and the dive training organisations should look at a similar concept for sport diving?

F. Michael Davis
Senior Lecturer in Anaesthesia

UNDER AGE DIVING

228 River Street
Ballina, NSW 2478
20 October 1989

Dear Sir

I was recently put on the spot when a 12 year old boy (accompanied by his father) presented for a diving medical, stating that scuba diving was an accepted sport at his school.

My immediate reaction was "no way", and a couple of quick telephone calls to underwater medicine trained colleagues confirmed my decision. I explained to the lad and his father my decision that the boy was too young to use scuba and my reasons for making this decision.

My reasons why a 12 year old boy (and other people under 16 years of age) should be considered unfit to dive are:

- a. This age group does not possess the maturity or confidence to avoid a sudden panic and rapid surfacing, thus undergoing the risk of cerebral arterial gas embolism (which can occur at depths greater than 1.5 m (4.5 feet).
- b. This group does not possess the maturity to fully understand and implement the "buddy" system whereby a diver in trouble may be completely reliant on his "buddy".
- c. Although there is little evidence to support the possibility of rapidly growing bones (such as in this age group) being more sensitive to dysbaric processes, there is a real possibility that diving at this age, even well within USN or BS-AC no-stop bottom times, may lead to dysbaric osteonecrosis.
- d. Persons under 16 are often of small stature with greatly varied physical appearance, which will inevitably lead to problems with ill-fitting equipment and discomfort, which will probably be accepted as just apart of training. Discomfort often leads to disability and subsequent trouble.
- e. At the completion of a diving course, irrespective of "limited" qualifications, persons of this age groups are liable to disregard their limitations and be tempted into diving situations outside safe diving practices. This may add their names to the long list of diving casualties or fatalities.

After contacting the school and finding out that scuba diving had been a Department of Education accepted Class C sport for Year 7 and above for 12 months, I was taken aback. However, I pursued my original line of action and brought the matter to the attention of the school principal and area State School Sport Administrator.

Having had some time to reconsider the matter, I believe the appropriate response would be:

1. have any diving candidate, but specifically one under 16, examined by a doctor with recognised expertise in Underwater Medicine;
2. require that the candidate is sufficiently physically robust for the rigorous aspects of diving;
3. ascertain that the candidate is mentally mature enough, i.e. has the common sense required for safe diving practice and not be tempted to use his gained skills unwisely in the future;
4. be restricted to buddy line diving with an experienced older diver until requalifying at age 16; and
5. keep well within the BS-AC tables as the rapidly growing bone of the under 16 age group may be unduly sensitive to dysbaric effect.

In retrospect, I would still fail a year 7 student for school scuba diving even if he fulfilled the listed criteria as I think passing such an individual would be discriminatory and create undue peer pressure which may affect safe diving practice.

Colin Macdonald
MBBS LCDR RANEM

STATEMENT ON SPORT DIVING

The Diving Medical Advisory Committee
28/30 Little Russell Street
LONDON WC1A 2HN
Tel: 01 405 7045 Telex: 267568 IMCOSM G
31 October 1989

Sport diving has become big business. There are major commercial interests that service the sport diving field, including the provision of gear, instruction of new divers through schools and the organisation of diving related holidays. Sport divers have begun to diver deeper, longer and more often, with the use of increasingly sophisticated gear. The dividing line between commercial and personal diving has become progressively less clear as the capabilities of sport diving equipment have increased. Some sport divers,