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THE WORLD AS IT IS

WHY DID DAN SUSPEND COVER FOR VANUATU ?

John Lippmann

Key Words

Accident, decompression illness, insurance, rescue, transport.

Over the past two years, DAN has been involved in the evacuation of around 15 divers from Vanuatu. We are also aware of a substantial number of divers who were not evacuated but who required treatment for decompression illness after returning home from Vanuatu.

Many of these divers had been diving on the *President Coolidge*, off Santo, to depths from around 20 m to approaching 70 m. DAN has expressed concern for some time about the amount of deep diving conducted on the *Coolidge*. In particular we have been concerned about:

- 1 The depth and number of dives conducted;
- 2 the minimal experience of many of the divers;
- 3 the incidence and severity of decompression illness occurring;
- 4 the lack of appropriate medical facilities for treating divers in Vanuatu;
- 5 the general lack of appropriate oxygen equipment and trained personnel;
- 6 the difficulty and delays sometimes associated with evacuating a person from Vanuatu;
- 7 the cost of evacuating a person from Vanuatu (around \$40,000).

Many divers believe that DAN is little more than an insurance company. **DAN is not an insurance company.** DAN buys insurance for its members from insurance companies. DAN is a non-profit, membership-based organisation dedicated to improving dive safety through a variety of activities that include:

- 1 Regular dive safety journals; educational programs and seminars;
- 2 funding diving emergency hotlines (e.g. the DES in Australia);
- 3 providing evacuation cover;
- 4 providing very economical dive injury insurance;
- 5 providing economical and effective oxygen equipment;
- 6 the provision of advisory services for diving health and safety;
- 7 providing support for the establishment of recompression chambers;
- 8 donation of safety equipment;
- 9 collection, analysis and reporting of dive accident data.

Over the past 12 months or so, DAN SEAP has expressed its concern to several dive operators in Vanuatu, pointing out that some insurers were considering placing restrictions on cover for certain dive destinations known to produce DCI. We warned that it was possible that some insurers might cease to offer cover for diving accidents in certain places. Despite our expressions of concern, we observed no reduction in the number of cases.

DAN believes that the best solution would be to have a suitable recompression facility established in Vanuatu. To this end, we approached some organisations and requested that they consider establishing such a facility. DAN offered to make a substantial initial contribution to the chamber and has offered to provide some funds to cover the on-going training and supervision requirements. One of the organisations we approached has spent considerable effort investigating establishing a facility in Vanuatu. The essential condition is that chamber is financially supported by the dive operators, who would have to put a small levy on the cost of each dive to cover the ongoing maintenance and operational costs of the chamber. There was some initial reluctance of some dive operators to support the levy concept and the potential chamber installer has notified us that he is now unwilling to commit himself to installing a chamber in Vanuatu.

The cost of evacuating divers from Vanuatu has been so high that our insurers threatened to cease offering us cover for evacuations from anywhere else, which could affect the viability of DAN S.E. Asia-Pacific. Clearly, we cannot risk our other vital services. As a result, we have been forced to suspend cover for evacuation from Vanuatu. Although we will cover divers who were DAN SEAP members at the time we restricted cover (July 1998), no new or renewing members will be covered for Vanuatu. This situation will be reviewed if and when an appropriate recompression facility is established in Vanuatu.

DAN SEAP has always advised its members to take out appropriate travel insurance when travelling overseas to cover a variety of situations, such as medical treatment, loss of luggage and so on. Many people feel far more comfortable having DAN involved in the evacuation, rather than an organisation that may not be as experienced in managing dive accidents. If a DAN member has travel insurance that will cover a diving accident we will be happy to work with the insurer, if we are contacted by the member, to advise on and facilitate an evacuation if required. However, many travel insurance policies impose a depth limit of 40 m and do not cover diving deeper.

DAN SEAP works hard to improve dive safety services throughout the Asia-Pacific region. For some years we have been involved in training the diving industry in accident management and have facilitated the availability of first aid equipment and facilities throughout the Region. We have established National offices in the Philippines (Makati Medical Centre), New Zealand (NZ Naval Hospital) and soon in Malaysia (Naval Hospital) to improve the availability of treatment to both residents and visitors to those countries. We have provided support for the establishment of recompression facilities in Phuket, Thailand and Papua New Guinea. The latest extensions of

DAN SEAP's work are the Nationally Accredited DAN SEAP general and workplace first aid courses that are now available in Australia.

DAN works hard to support divers, and without the support of divers, we cannot continue to function. DAN SEAP works on a very small budget and its few staff work long and hard to assist both members and non-members. The staff get rather frustrated when people see us a "just another insurance company". We are not and will never be such a company. DAN SEAP receives no government funding and receives minimal donations from the diving industry. Everything we do, we fund through membership revenue and certification fees. We need the support of members to exist and to continue to grow. If you believe that DAN is a worthwhile organisation you should encourage other divers to join and find ways to help us. The ball is in your court!

John Lippmann is Executive Director of DAN S.E.Asia-Pacific. He is co-author, with Stan Bugg, of THE DIVER EMERGENCY HANDBOOK which first appeared in 1984 and has since been adopted by DAN USA and the British Sub-Aqua Club. It has also been translated into Japanese, German and Italian. He is also author of DEEPER INTO DIVING, THE ESSENTIALS OF DEEPER DIVING and OXYGEN FIRST AID FOR DIVERS. For his contributions to diving safety he was elected a member of SPUMS in 1996.

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SPUMS NOTICES

ERRATUM

SPUMS J 1998; 28 (1).

In the paper by Carl Edmonds *Drowning syndromes: the mechanism* (SPUMS J 1998; 28 (1):2-9) reference 1 (Donald WK. Drowning. *Brit Med J* 1995; (2): 155-160) was misdated. The paper was actually published in 1955 and the date, volume and pages should read 1955; 2: 155-160.

Key Words

Notice.

PROFESSOR JOHN WILLIAMSON AM

The Executive Committee of SPUMS congratulates Dr John Williamson, Director of the Hyperbaric Medicine Unit at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, on his appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

The appointment was for his contributions to the fields of Marine Envenomation, Surf Lifesaving, St John's Ambulance and Hyperbaric Medicine. Dr Williamson has also found time to be a Committee Member of SPUMS (1984-1987, 1990-1993 and 1994-19960).