

Letter to the Editor

Australia's model work health and safety regulations and medical fitness requirements for professional divers

In my recent roles as Education Officer for SPUMS and also SPUMS representative on Standards Australia, there were frequent queries regarding the requirements for professional diving medicals in Australia. The requirements for Australia have been set by Australian Federal Government Legislation: *Australian model work health and safety regulations* (4 November 2011).¹

The legislation requires the medical practitioner providing certification of divers to be registered in Australia. In keeping with this legislation, the 2014 version of Australian/New Zealand Standard 2299.1 will separate the medical requirements for divers depending in which country they are working. New Zealand has a centralised registry and health review system for its professional diver medicals, whereas this is not the case in Australia.

In the new Australian model work, health and safety regulations, the section on *Diving work* commences on page 177, section 4.8. The legislation requires that all occupational divers receive a "current certificate of medical fitness to dive by a doctor with appropriate training in underwater medicine". By the legislated reference to AS2299.1:2007,² the South Pacific Underwater Medicine Society is referred to as the appropriate body to provide information on training courses in diving medicine for medical practitioners.

The following is offered for guidance, and the linkages for this mandate are as follows: (The page numbers referred to are in the model work, health and safety regulations)

Definition of "appropriate training in underwater medicine" (Page 4):

Appropriate training in underwater medicine means training that results in knowledge of the matters specified in clause M3 of Appendix M to AS/NZS 2299.1:2007 (Occupational diving operations—Standard operational practice).

The requirement for workers to hold a "current certificate of medical fitness" (Page 177, clause 168)

Division 2 General diving work – Fitness and competence of worker

168 Person conducting business or undertaking must ensure fitness of workers

A person conducting a business or undertaking at a workplace must not direct or allow a worker to carry out general diving work or undergo training for general diving work unless the worker holds a current certificate of medical fitness.

Definition of "fitness criteria" (Page 19):

Fitness criteria, in relation to diving work, means the fitness criteria specified in clause M4 of Appendix M to AS/NZS 2299.1:2007 (Occupational diving operations— standard operational practice)

M 4.1 General:

The following bodily systems (Paragraphs M 4.2 to M 4.14) should be evaluated from the diver's history and the medical examination. Where relevant, numerical values are given for certain medical fitness requirements.

The paragraphs M 4.2 to M 4.14 then cover a comprehensive assessment of body systems that can only be carried out with a medical assessment which includes a physical examination.

Definition of "current" (Page 15):

Current certificate of medical fitness means a certificate of medical fitness that:

(a) was issued within the past 12 months;

And (b) has not expired or been revoked.

Requirement that the certificate is issued by a registered medical practitioner with "appropriate training in underwater medicine" (Page 178, clause 169);

169 Certificate of medical fitness

A certificate of medical fitness must:

be issued by a registered medical practitioner with appropriate training in underwater medicine.

and (E) Definition of "registered medical practitioner" (Page 39):

Registered medical practitioner means a person registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to practise in the medical profession (other than as a student).

References

- 1 *Australian model work health and safety regulations.* [cited 2014 August 11]. Available from: http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/Model_Work_Health_and_Safety_Regulations.pdf.
- 2 Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand. Australian/New Zealand Standard 2299.1. Occupational diving operations Part 1: Standard operational practice. 2007. ISBN 0 7337 8326 0.

*Associate Professor David Smart, MD
Department of Diving and Hyperbaric Medicine,
Royal Hobart Hospital
Hobart, Tasmania 7000, Australia
E-mail: <david.smart@dhhs.tas.gov.au>*

Key words

Diving at work, occupational diving, occupational health, fitness to dive, letter (to the Editor)