

Abstracts

QUESTION 1 & 2 **IS THERE A CONSENSUS ABOUT THE FITNESS-TO-DIVE CRITERIA?** **IS A MEDICAL RE-ASSESSMENT NECESSARY FOR ALL DIVERS?**

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Impact of pre-dive medical examination on the incidence of diving accidents.

Occupational divers and caisson workers are obliged to undergo an annual medical examination before being permitted to carry out any pressure related activity. With the advent of Evidence Based Medicine the advantages of such medical examinations as against a self-administered health questionnaire are not clear. Only a few studies were carried out to show if such screening is truly effective in reducing diver morbidity and mortality

A longitudinal study to examine the usefulness of such pre-dive medical examinations was carried out. The observed morbidity and mortality in Maltese divers during the period 1994 to 2000 was compared to a population of European divers as represented by the Divers Alert Network Europe membership during the same years. The incidence rate of decompression illness (DCI) in the Maltese divers was found to be 1 DCI per 16420 dives while that in the DAN Europe divers was found to be 1 DCI per 6400 dives. This gave a relative risk of 0.4 that was found to be significant ($p < 0.001$).

The only significant difference between the two populations identified in this study is that the Maltese divers are obliged to undergo a diving medical examination before starting to dive and at regular intervals while the DAN Europe population is under no such obligation and may opt to complete a self administered health checklist instead.

The conclusion of this study is that a pre-participation medical examination is a useful health protection tool and has advantages over a self-administered health checklist.