

**AN EMERGENCY DIVING NETWORK FOR THE CARE OF COMMERCIAL DIVERS IN THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC, CANADA: THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF ACTIVITY IN REVIEW** Tremblay SD, Boisvert J, Buteau D, Côté M. Hyperbaric Medicine Unit, Hôtel-Dieu de Lévis Hospital, Lévis, Quebec, Canada, G6V 3Z1

**BACKGROUND:** Vast and abundant water resources in the province of Quebec make hydroelectric power a logical source of energy. Commercial divers are frequently called to work on water installations and their numerous dams for inspections and repair in harsh conditions and sometimes in a wide range of water temperatures. Because of the large geographical area of the province and its scarce medical coverage, emergencies for commercial divers pose special problems. Two hyperbaric facilities manage the recreational diving accidents while most of commercial diving accidents are treated onsite with inexistent or poor medical supervision. Previous data from the Quebec Work Health and Safety Commission indicated that from 1982 to 1994 the mortality rate for commercial divers was 3.9/1000 workers. This represents a 20 fold increase compared to the overall mortality rate of construction workers in Quebec (0.18/ 1000). **METHOD:** The network was implemented in May 2004 with the primary goal of enhancing the quality of medical care to divers. The main characteristics of the network is to: a- offer rapid medical care to divers b- provide care according to evidenced based medicine or to consensus view on the topic c- provide 24-hour online medical assistance to physicians and mobile chamber operators d- provide continuous medical education. All activities of the network were compiled from May 2004 to December 2005. **RESULTS:** A total of 161 calls were received during this period. Of those calls about 55% were from commercial divers and the rest concerned recreational divers. About 9% of commercial diver's calls were for emergency matters whereas the rest (73%) were for general information. Of the eight treated divers two were treated for Type I DCS, five for Type II DCS and one diver was intoxicated by hydrocarbon contaminants in his air supply. **CONCLUSION:** Providing quality care to commercial divers through an emergency response diving network requires careful preparation and planning. Although the results presented hereby only relate to our first two years of activity, we believe that the network may have a beneficial effect on commercial diver's morbidity rates.

**Suggested category:** Decompression illness

**Authorizations:** a) Y b) Y

**Financial disclosure:** a) Y b) N

**Qualification for an oral presentation:**

We strongly believe that this abstract should qualify for oral presentation. Indeed, we feel that discussing the topic of implementing an emergency response diving network is probably more appropriate as an oral presentation rather than an abstract. Over a period of more than 7 years, a lot of work was involved in the process of implementing the network. To our knowledge, this is the first emergency diving network providing continuous care and supervision of commercial divers in Canada. In that respect, it has, in our view, a significant scientific merit. We believe that the

hyperbaric community may want to share our perspective and that we may all benefit from that experience.