Buddy diving and DCS

A dive in the clear waters of the upper Adriatic to explore submerged relics: this was the enticing plan of four Hungarian friends who last May set out for Croatia for a weekend of relaxation and fun. All are relatively young (between 30 and 34) and fit, among them some quite experienced divers: one is even an instructor.

On the first day the group performs a check-dive to about 16 metres. It lasts 35 minutes and goes without problems.

On the following day, intent on visiting the Baron Gautsch wreck, the four descend to a depth of 38 metres. The dive doesn't last long, however: the instructor realizes his suit has a hole in it and he is risking hypothermia.

In Spring, at those depth, the water temperature is in fact 10 degrees. The instructor realizes that he has to interrupt the dive. His buddy, protected by a two piece 7-mm suit, helps him back towards the surface; the other two friends follow too. They all have enough air to respect the necessary decompression stops.

According to their accounts, notwithstanding the emergency, they didn't swim up too fast and once out of the water they had no symptoms; in fact, three hours after the failed dive, the group sets off in the car heading back to Hungary, a 500 Km journey.

That is where the problems started. As soon as the vehicle starts climbing the roads over the mountains, the man who had risked hypothermia starts to feel ill: going at high altitudes after a dive can, in fact, affect DCS. He has vertigo, pains in his shoulders and feels weak. Even the friend who'd helped him up has the same symptoms, though less severe. The group decides to carry on in any case – Hungary isn't far – and in the meantime they call the DAN national emergency hotline. An operator, once verified that they are covered by the DAN Sport Silver policy, immediately alerts the nearest hyperbaric centre. In the meantime the conditions of the two buddies worsen. Lucky other friends were driving!

Upon their arrival in Hungary the two men are visited immediately. The first is semi-conscious, with cutis marmorata to his stomach and bust with severe neurological symptoms such as fatigue, vertigo, dulled reflexes and poor coordination and balance. The diagnosis is obvious, requiring urgent therapy: decompression sickness, to be treated according to Table 6 of the US Navy. Several decompression chamber sessions over six long days prove necessary for the symptoms to disappear completely.

There are also visible improvements for his friend, who has similar decompression sickness symptoms (cutis marmorata in the torso and shoulders, itchiness, tiredness, headache and pain to the legs). He is also treated with a Table 6 for a shorter period. The other two friends feel slightly fatigued, but they don't need the decompression chamber: breathing oxygen is enough to make them feel better.

Notwithstanding all went well at the end of the day, there was still a cost: over 5000 Euro for the first patient, nearly 4000 Euro for his friend. The injured instructor was lucky that he was doing a recreational dive, otherwise only a Pro plan would have covered him whilst giving instruction for any type of dive, including technical ones with no limits on depth.

Further reading

"The Law of the Good Samaritan" **in Europe**

One of the first rules of scuba diving is not to dive alone. A diving buddy is not only for sharing fun and experiences, but also for attention and commitment in avoiding possible risks. A well-known saying among divers is "your diving buddy is the most important thing you take into the water with you". In case of an

emergency, being alone could prove fatal.
On the other hand, one of the most frequent questions our members ask us is: if I help another diver in difficulty and cause him injury in trying to resuscitate him, could I be held legally responsible? To quell these doubts, we are making available for everyone a useful article written by DAN Legal Network lawyers, on the “Law of the Good Samaritan” and its application in different European countries.