Technical Expert… of Persuasion

A long, unforgettable underwater safari along the seabeds "with the highest concentration of animal life in the world," in the words of Captain Cousteau… It's the dream of a sixty year old French diving expert, who, together with his wife, took off in March to the coast of Sudan.

On the 16th of March, during the last decompression stop at 3 metres after a technical dive lasting 45 minutes at a depth of 54 metres, the man is suddenly accosted by back pain, so strong that he needs help to resurface to the boat.

On board he is immediately administered oxygen and the symptoms seem to recede, but then after a few hours, they return even stronger and more alarming, with a diminishing sense of touch and loss of muscular strength and coordination in the lower limbs. DCS is suspected.

His wife calls DAN Europe's emergency hotline, asking for help for her spouse who is a DAN Member covered by the Pro Silver plan; a plan valid for every kind of dive, including technical diving.

However, a problem emerges: the lack of available sites that treat this type of health emergency. The nearest hyperbaric chamber is in Port Sudan; ten hours away from the site of the accident, and as it is used by an underwater worksite, it does not accept outpatients.

In cases such as this, it's crucial to act as soon as possible, so DAN Europe asks the French consul to intervene. Staying in constant contact and consultation with the DAN Europe emergency centre, the diplomat stresses the urgency of the case, and using his ability to persuade and negotiate, manages to obtain access to the site for the man's recovery.

The diagnosis is severe Decompression Sickness of the spinal cord and vestibular system. The patient undergoes the first hyperbaric session that lasts over six hours, but there are no significant improvements noted.

In the meantime, the DAN emergency centre has already contacted seven different airlines to organise the return to his country in air ambulance with medical personnel aboard. Having obtained availability with an Italian carrier, they succeed in transporting the man and his wife back to France; covering the entire cost of the operation, which amounts to 37.000 Euro.

At the Toulon airport an ambulance awaits them, alerted by Peter Germonpre, Medical Director of DAN Benelux and France , who has personally taken care of securing their transport by the Miltary Hospital of Sainte-Anne. Forty-eight hours after the accident, the victim is newly recovered, undergoing hyperbaric treatment and medications.

The intensive treatment takes its beneficial effect: the patient's condition progressively improves, and the physicians are optimistic about a complete recovery. On the 27th of March, the man is dismissed from the hospital and prescribed sessions of physiotherapy, marking the end of his terrible adventure.