

INTRODUCTION

Decompression sickness (DCS) is entirely a clinical diagnosis that requires immediate attention due to the serious complications it can cause. Prompt recognition and timely intervention, such as recompression therapy in a hyperbaric chamber, are crucial to prevent long-term damage or even life-threatening outcomes.

CASE DESCRIPTION

A 64-year-old fisherman with underlying hypertension presented to our centre, Hospital Lahad Datu, with complaint of severe back and abdominal pain, associated with bilateral lower limb numbness up to umbilical region. There was no history of trauma prior. Upon further history, he had went diving to catch fish before onset of symptoms using a hose connected to petrol-based air compressor around 40 meter in length and dived underwater in a depth of around 20 meters for 3 hours straight. Subsequently, he ascended for 30 minutes before diving back into the water of the same depth for the second time. It was only then, he developed such symptoms. Upon presentation to our Emergency Department, he was triaged to Yellow Zone in view pain despite having normal vital signs. Thorough history taking and clinical examination, equipped with relatively normal blood investigation and imaging prompted us to come to the diagnosis of Decompression Sickness Type 1. He was put on high flow mask (HFM) oxygen supplement and pain was managed accordingly. Next, an arrangement was made for ground transfer to The Royal Malaysian Navy's facility based in Semporna in which hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) commenced; a centre located approximately 2 hours away. He was eventually discharged well and symptom-free.

DISCUSSION

Sabah, with its extensive coastline and large fishing community, has seen a rise in the use of compressor diving due to declining fishery yields. However, this method, often employed without adequate equipment or proper monitoring, poses significant risks to divers. Among these risks are decompression sickness, often exacerbated by the absence of tools like diving watches for safe ascents. Additionally, the use of hydrocarbon-based compressors can lead to carbon monoxide inhalation and other related health issues.

CONCLUSION

Decompression sickness, a well-documented condition, is becoming more prevalent in Sabah. This highlights the increasing demand for additional hyperbaric chamber facilities to accommodate the growing needs of the affected population.

References:

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