



Encounter With DCS

*An Object Lesson Pays Big Dividends
For Last-Minute DAN Member in Mexico*

BY SCOTT D. JONES

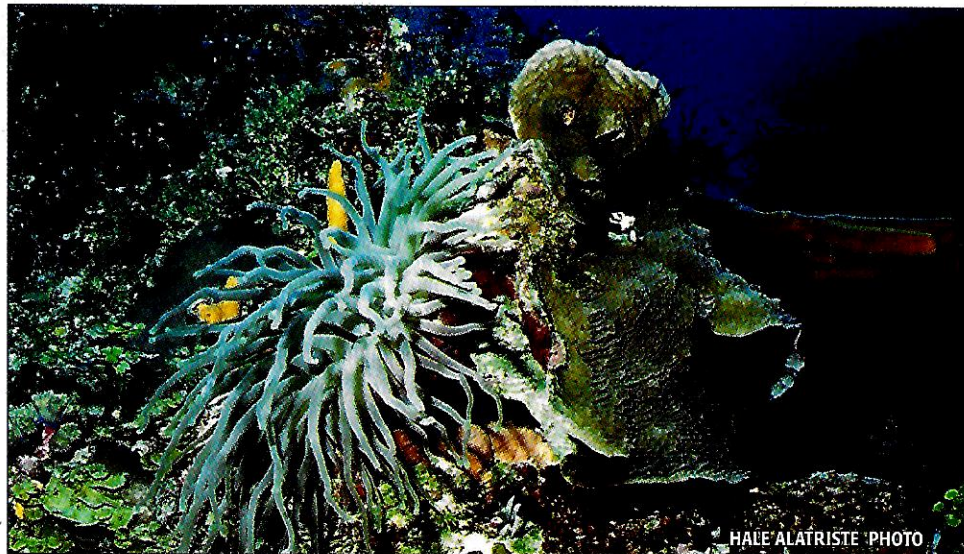
Todd Sprague remembers his dive instructor and others talking about the need for DAN insurance before he left on a group trip to Cozumel last January. But it actually took a diving scare the first day of the adventure to motivate Sprague to sign up for DAN protection.

Part of a group of 20 divers enjoying the warm waters of the Mexican diving hot-spot together, Sprague watched in shock as one of the divers took a precautionary ride to the chamber after the first dive of the trip. Sprague was one of four members of the group who immediately sought out a computer and signed up for DAN coverage right there in the hotel lobby. Little did Sprague know that three days later, that decision would literally save him thousands of dollars.

It was a routine dive and Sprague dived a conservative profile, but at the surface he noticed telltale DCS symptoms that included tingling in his arms. The dive operator immediately went into action and Sprague was brought to one of Cozumel's recompression chambers. His treatment began immediately and included two sessions over two days.

"It's still hard to believe that it actually happened. My only symptoms were a tingling sensation along the inside of my forearms and hands. It was light at first, then it got stronger," he recalls. "I think I might not have gone to the chamber if not for DAN. The symptoms were light enough that it took a bit of convincing by the doctor that I needed treatment."

Sprague, who is an active triathlete and in good shape, was in the chamber for more than seven hours and at a cost of \$800 per hour; feels very fortunate to have had DAN protection. "I figure that DAN has earned



a life member, since they probably already have saved me more money than I can pay back in a lifetime."

Although the exact cause of Sprague's decompression illness was not determined, dehydration and lack of proper rest may have influenced his susceptibility, something he readily acknowledges. "I had some doubts that morning (of the dive) about my condition for diving and I wish I had heeded them. Missing a day of diving would have been much preferable to missing the rest of the trip's dives. Breathing 100 percent oxygen from a regulator for several hours is no fun."

Trip leader Kamala Shaddock of SingleDivers.com said the group was encouraged to have DAN Insurance prior to departure. "We strongly recommended that all participants have DAN insurance, but after what happened here, it is now mandatory for everyone who takes part in one of our trips." Shaddock added, "It was unfortunate that Todd had to use his DAN insurance, but thank goodness he signed up when he did."

Ironically, the incident that led to Sprague and the divers to their "hotel-lobby conversion" was not DCS, but rather another medical condition. That didn't matter to him or other trip participants. "I feel like I hit the lottery. My usual thought about insurance is that the surest way to NOT need it is to pay for it. I guess I proved that theory wrong this time."

Sprague, a Northern California resident, plans to continue diving in the future, although he has a new level of respect and caution. "I know now that I had better feel 100 percent the morning of a dive or I'll just snuggle back into my pillow."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DAN Member Scott Jones is a dive journalist who has been diving and writing about it for 20-plus years. He is currently editor of *Divernews*, a press release service with wide distribution in the dive industry.