



The Safer Bet

Why DAN Doesn't Provide Chamber Location Information



WILLIAM M. MERCADANTE PHOTOS

It's a question the DAN Medical Services team hears innumerable times.

"I read (or heard) that DAN gives out chamber locations," it often goes. "What's the nearest one to me?" Or, "What's the nearest one to where I'm going to be diving?"

DAN Medical Services Director Daniel Nord and his fellow medics have come to expect the query like clockwork. "Every day, we get probably at least one call on the information line," he said.

And, except for two special categories of divers, the answer is always the same: "We don't give out chamber information to the general public."

The Reasons Why

"The list [of available chambers] is always changing," Nord said. "In some cases, the availability of chambers fluctuates from day to day." For DAN to keep up with their status would be a counterproductive to the organization, given the many reasons why a chamber may not be open or simply available.

Some chambers close for maintenance or staff vacation. Some have a high patient treatment load and a smaller chamber capacity, limiting the number of clients they can handle. Many do not staff their facilities without prior notification from an evaluating doctor or clinic. Finally, most hyperbaric facilities have regular daytime business hours and are not staffed nor choose to staff their unit in the evenings and on weekends. (However, with proper notice, most facilities will make their resources available for emergency situations.)

Said Nord: "The information may be used inappropriately for a diver who may not require hyperbaric therapy (e.g. cardiac disease). With the United States and Canada at least, we don't like to give out this information because there is already a well-implemented EMS (emergency medical services) system to deal with emergencies. For the diver traveling to remote areas of the world, we'll share general hospital and chamber location information. However, this advice is often tempered with a strong recommendation to contact DAN in the event of an emergency."

The system Nord mentioned may preclude using a hyperbaric treatment facility altogether. In typical American and Canadian dive emergencies, EMS personnel will assist in the transport of the injured patient, who will be stabilized before and during transport and transferred under medical supervision to a hospital or urgent care facility. These places have an unlimited supply of oxygen, intravenous fluids and medications, as well as physicians.

Before determining if chamber treatment is needed, a physician / emergency care provider needs to rule out other illness such as pneumothorax (collapsed lung), myocardial infarction (heart attack), and neurological and musculoskeletal injuries with symptoms similar to decompression illness (DCI). An improper diagnosis will waste precious time for a patient and may adversely affect the diver's health and treatment outcome.

Other Concerns

Unlike the medics at DAN who answer thousands of questions each year, chamber personnel are providing direct patient care: not only are locations requested but phone numbers as well. As long as DAN can act as a filter for hyperbaric units and help screen calls, limiting requests to actual assistance calls or treatment issues, there is no danger that chamber staff or administration will become disenfranchised with seeing divers, noted Vice president of medical services Joel Dovenbarger. "At present they know when DAN calls, we generally have diver for them," he said.

DAN deals directly with chambers on a routine basis, providing patient referrals and

treatment consults. DAN helps chambers by establishing standardized chamber guidelines for high-quality hyperbaric treatment care via the Diving Preferred Provider Network (DPPN). Neither a managed care group nor a health maintenance organization, or HMO, the DPPN is designed to make it easier for participating chambers to receive "reasonable and customary" payment for services rendered and establish basic standards and procedures, including being available 24 hours a day. This is to provide the best care for divers and to limit some overextended treatment protocols.

Naturally, DAN does not give out a list of what chambers comprise the DPPN either. And just because a chamber does not belong to the DPPN doesn't mean that DAN does not work with it. (As a matter of fact, the DPPN has an advisory board of experts trained in diving medicine and an outside company overseeing it; DAN does not supervise the network.)

Finally, some chambers prefer to keep operating information confidential and do not want DAN to release it. Reasons vary, but they generally include limited staffing, operating hours and inability to handle a large volume of patients or information calls.

Two Exceptions

Two groups do receive chamber information from DAN. "We do handle requests for chamber locations for commercial dive contractors and the U.S. Navy," Nord said.

For commercial dive contractors in the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires them to have information on nearby recompression facilities as part of their job safety measures. "They have to apply to us to get answers," Nord said, adding that these contractors are recognized by DAN.

As for the other group, Nord said: "We're under contract with the U.S. Navy to provide its personnel with chamber information for operational planning. Military dive operations worldwide, require the foreknowledge of all available chambers within a set geographic area. And this information is available 24/

7 via a secure website or the DAN Diving Emergency Hotline."

Why the Misguided Belief?

Like many urban legends, the "DAN has a list of chambers it'll give to any diver" claim has been spread, without attribution, onto the internet via several websites. In fact, DAN has never said it offered such information; in several articles and publications over the years, it has said the opposite.

Other major dive information sources also note this rule. The PADI manual specifically tells its instructors not to have their students call DAN to inquire about chamber locations. "DAN keeps constant tabs on changes in the status of these facilities, but please do not have your divemaster and rescue diver students acquire 'nearest chamber' information for a preparedness plan," the manual states. "They should have first aid and evaluation plans and the DAN emergency number only."

The PADI manual is correct. The only thing to add is that as part of a dive-related injury you should monitor the ABCs (Airway, Breathing, Circulation) and provide 100 percent oxygen if you are a trained oxygen provider.

Remember, in most conditions, hyperbaric therapy is an adjunct to other care delivered by physicians and surgeons. It is not the sole answer for handling DCI. Your best bet always is to rely on the advice of DAN and your physicians rather than just find out where your nearest recompression facility is located.

Portions of this article appeared originally on the DAN website at www.DiversAlertNetwork.org/medical/chamberlocation.asp. 

**DAN PROVIDES SERVICES
NO DIVER SHOULD BE
WITHOUT**



Get DAN's annual report on diving injuries and deaths and project dive exploration **FREE** from the "Members Only" section of www.DiversAlertNetwork.org
To purchase a printed version, call DAN at **1-800-446-2671**.