

Key Words

Disabled, training.

This letter was sent to Drew Richardson PADI International Vice-President, Training, Education and Memberships, whose reply is printed below.

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Dear Editor

I read Dr Marwood's letter with interest, and while I agree that some of the issues he raises are valid, I disagree with what he implies, that there is something wrong when individuals who have physical or intellectual disabilities earn the same diver credentials as an individual without those disabilities. With all respect to Dr Marwood, it appears he may have missed the point while reading the 2nd Quarter 1996 *Undersea Journal*.

PADI's philosophy is that only those who meet the performance requirements of a particular course earn the certification. The performance requirements say nothing about the individual's characteristics, but rather, what the individual must be able to do. There are individuals with *and without* disabilities who fail to meet the performance requirements. These individuals do not earn, and do not receive, the certification.

This is not to say that there are not challenges in learning for individuals with some disabilities, but people without disabilities have learning challenges too. Instructional theory prescribes handling challenges by changing the instructional and learning components, *not* the individual

To handle some disabilities, adaptive or unusual techniques may be needed, to meet the performance. Mask clearing can be done by holding the top, by turning to the side and holding the edge, by purge valve and with two hands. If the mask ends up free of water in all cases, the method is right.

The idea that some divers with a particular certification will not be "equal" to other divers is not an issue, either. If a diver swims with his hands, it may be that he could not handle a current as well as another diver. However, the same could be said about an athlete diver and a more sedate diver. Individuals have personal limitations within qualifications and must use good judgement to stay within their limits. This is true for any diver, at any level, with or without physical or intellectual challenges.

Dr Marwood writes, "The theme of the PADI statement of policy ... is that disabled divers, even some quite profoundly disabled, should be given every expectation not only of obtaining a basic open-water ticket [sic], but going on to "Advanced" and even "Rescue" qualifications."

Dr Marwood is correct that this is our theme. The issue is what the individual can do, not what he cannot do. Achieving performance standards often rests with the determination of the individual with the disability, who may excel beyond all expectations, and exceed the performance of a normal person.

Dr Marwood may be correct to suggest that it is unreasonable to give individuals in such a situation "every expectation" of success, but the student, and no one else, decides what can be achieved.

Dr Marwood's concern about an individual earning a Rescue Diver certification, for example, would be groundless. If an individual can perform the skills, the diver earns the certification. He is as competent as any other PADI trained diver.

There are individuals, with and without disabilities, who fail to meet the medical requirements for diving. These people are not admitted into PADI programs. In the absence of medical contraindications to diving the training and educational process is the best way to assess an individual's ability to dive.

Dr Marwood also suggests a "special" certification for divers with individual needs. Groups such as the Handicapped Scuba Association, issue special certifications for individuals with disabilities who cannot meet the performance requirements for regular certification. These specialised certifications do identify the necessary qualifications for the buddy and even that there must be two able bodied buddies who can assist each other as well as the diver. So to this extent, Dr Marwood's suggestion stands.

Finally, PADI would support a SPUMS meeting that addresses diving for those who have physical and intellectual disabilities. We would hope the dive community at large would participate, and we would encourage everyone, including our competitors, to attend. However, we would prefer the title "Diving for those with Disabilities." To our way of thinking, there is a significant difference between having a disability, a physical or intellectual challenge, and being disabled.

Drew Richardson
Vice-President, Training, Education and Memberships

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