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Newly-published medical study confirms significant therapeutic benefits of Scuba Diving

A seminal study into the therapeutic benefits of scuba diving by students from the University of Sheffield's Medical School has been published this week.

The study is published in the Journal of Disability and Rehabilitation under the title: ***“Can scuba diving offer therapeutic benefit to military veterans experiencing physical and psychological injuries as a result of combat? A service evaluation of Depththerapy UK.”***

A research team led by Alice Morgan, and comprising Harriet Sinclair, Alexander Tan and Ellen Thomas, set out to explore the effectiveness of scuba diving in providing therapeutic and rehabilitative benefit to ex-Service personnel who have experienced traumatic physical and/or psychological injuries resulting from combat.

The study took the form of a service evaluation of Depththerapy, the UK-based charity offering support to military veterans who have experienced life-changing injuries. Depththerapy provides scuba diving qualifications, consisting of theory and practical diving experience, to participants alongside a Buddy Peer Support scheme that provides continuing support to veterans involved with the charity.

A total of 15 male veterans were invited to take part in the study, which took place in 2016 but has only just been published. The methodology comprised retrospective and current quantitative measures of mental well-being and functional ability, utilising the General Health Questionnaire-28, and subsequent semi-structured interviews with participants, their families and health professionals.

Participants reported an improvement in levels of anxiety, depression and social functioning, and a reduction in insomnia, following their involvement in organised scuba diving activities. In particular, the positive perceptions, as indicated from the interviews, were more pronounced in those whose injuries were predominantly psychological, rather than physical.

The study concluded that scuba diving can offer significant therapeutic benefits, particularly for ex-military amputees experiencing co-morbid anxiety and/or chronic psychological adjustment disorders such as PTSD, notably in terms of improvements in social dysfunction and the symptomatology of depression.



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Until now, medical research into scuba diving as a therapy for injury and disability has been very limited. This study, therefore, offers both considerable insight into the potential of scuba diving as a therapeutic aid, as well as independent validation of the actual benefits of the Depththerapy Scuba Diving programme, as well as recommendations for further development.

Psychologist and Depththerapy Vice President Richard Castle, who undertook a supervisory role during the study, said:

"This has been a crucially important piece of research [by the University of Sheffield Medical School] and demonstrates the positive impact that the Depththerapy model can have for ex-Service personnel who have experienced life-changing physical and mental injuries. Crucially, the study also identifies areas where Depththerapy can improve the level of support we offer, and the study recommendations have already been taken forward by the Depththerapy Board. We now need additional resources to monitor the impact going forward, and commission further independent longitudinal research and to widen the evidence base to assess the results of the developments we have initiated."

Richard Cullen, Chairman of Depththerapy said:

"I am so glad that Alice Morgan and team's paper is now in the public domain. It speaks volumes about our work. At the time of the study we had already become aware of the post-expedition problems that individuals were suffering. We have since developed a first class Buddy Peer Support Scheme, utilising those of our team who are mental health first aid trained to actively support Programme Members when they return home. This has since expanded into increasingly thorough pre-expedition support. Depththerapy offers 24/7 individual support to all programme members. Mental health and safeguarding those we work with is an absolute priority for the Depththerapy charity."

Depththerapy Ambassador and Trustee Ben Lee is one of the military veterans who has actively benefitted from being introduced to scuba diving through Depththerapy. Double-amputee Ben is currently training to be a Divemaster. The former Royal Engineer recently won the Royal Foundation's Endeavour Fund 'Recognising Achievement' Award. Ben said:

"Scuba diving on the Depththerapy programme has changed my life; I no longer think I can't do something because of my disabilities, I just jump in and try it. The visible face of Depththerapy is often people like me, those who have lost limbs through IED explosions in Iraq or Afghanistan. Many people see that as the focus of all our efforts but 80% of our programme members suffer



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from less visible injuries including PTSD, cancer, multiple sclerosis and blindness.

As a trustee of Depththerapy I see the effort that goes in to delivering a programme for each individual that is tailored to their specific needs. On behalf of all the Programme Members I wish to thank the University of Sheffield Medical School for supporting this study and especially to Alice Morgan and her team for a first class insight into what Depththerapy does."

Details of the full medical study may be found at:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/NZg98zgPNJdYZzYd2gSB/full>

Do you know... it costs £1500 to fund a wounded in service veteran on a PADI Open Water course on the Depththerapy Programme. Depththerapy's life changing work can only continue if they raise enough funds. The charity receives at least two applications every week from British Armed Forces veterans who would benefit from their Programme. Please help Depththerapy continue to make a difference to their lives. Pledge your support and find out more about Depththerapy & Depththerapy Education at www.depththerapy.co.uk.

Ends

Notes for Editors

Case Studies and Interviews: A number of case studies on individual Depththerapy Programme Members are available for use in support of this press release and / or as a precursor to interviews. Please contact Richard Cullen (details below) to arrange.

Images: The attached images can be used to illustrate this story - (1) Depththerapy Programme Member Jason Cowan on the first day of his PADI Open Water Diver course; (2) Depththerapy Programme Member Andy Searle diving the wreck of the Salem Express; and, (3) Depththerapy programme members undertaking open water training at Roots Red Sea. All photos: Dmitry Knyazev for Depththerapy.

Depththerapy & Depththerapy Education is an English Charity registered with the Charity Commission. It seeks to rehabilitate UK Armed Service personnel and veterans who have suffered life changing mental and/or physical challenges through specially designed Scuba Diving Programmes. It also provides 24/7 support to Programme Members. Depththerapy is



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widely respected for changing the lives of those who come on the Programme. Many Programme Members have suffered limb loss and or acute mental illness. 80% of Programme Members suffer from PTSD or other acute forms of mental illness. The charity also provides education in adaptive scuba diving techniques to Dive Professionals.

For further information and / or images, please contact:

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