

MARITIME DERMATOLOGY

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The awareness of the effects of the environment on human health is growing. The sea is a major component of the environment. Health problems of seafarers related to sea voyages and their skin diseases have been known and studied since a long time¹, also in France. The work of French doctors in this field and the activities of the French Society of Maritime Medicine were described in a paper published in 2004². Similar societies have been established in several other countries and three international forums for exchanging experiences are existing at present: the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA), the international symposia on maritime health regularly conducted since decades, and the journal International Maritime Health.

Until 2004, there were no special medical meetings organised on maritime dermatology - the component of maritime health – with a focus on skin diseases of seafarers.

With the support of the French Society of Maritime Medicine, doctors in France have decided to organise such meetings on maritime dermatology, in French. They are conducted just one day before international rallies of old ships (Cutty Sark Tall Ship Races). The first maritime dermatology meeting took place on July 9th, 2004, in Brest and the second on July 26th, 2006, in Douarnenez. Eight lectures were given at each meeting and there were about 100 participants to attend each of them. Various aspects of maritime dermatology were presented and discussed: environmental problems, occupational diseases of the skin of seafarers and their treatment, dermatitis of the hands

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of fishermen related to the contact with sea animals and plants, solar dermatitis, the problem of sexually transmitted diseases of seafarers, research, etc.

Jean-Dominique Dewitte, past president of the French Society of Maritime Medicine, and Brice Loddé (Brest) described occupational diseases of seamen, particularly skin diseases. Alain Baert (Rennes) described the numerous effects of black tides on the skin and on the general health. In the maritime environment, the ultraviolet radiation may be more or less dangerous depending on various weather conditions. The UV index has been defined in France (Joël Jan, Météo France, Rennes). Some skin diseases are due to water itself (Francis Carsuzaa, Toulon).

Animal and plant life from the sea could cause various skin lesions. This very broad subject was discussed by Gérard Guillet (Poitiers) or Arnaud Cenac (Brest). Dominique Jegaden (Brest), President of the French Society of Maritime Medicine reported a reaction to the red sea weed : *Asparagopsis armata*.

Aquatic sports also may provoke skin lesions (Jean-Paul Poirier, Saint Laurent du Var), especially in yachtsmen (Martin Perromat, Saint Jean de Luz). Some of them are allergic diseases (Catherine Pecquet, Paris).

Products obtained from the sea water are used for making cosmetics and drugs (Laurence Coiffard, Nantes), especially bacterial exopolysaccharides from micro-organisms which live in extreme conditions (Claire Boisset and Jean Guézennec, Brest).

The history of maritime dermatology is very interesting. Laurent Misery has related the life of Victor Segalen, who was a dermatologist of the French Navy but also a famous writer, an archaeologist, one of the first ethnologist and sinologist, with various other talents. Daniel Wallach (Paris) gave the participants an excellent lecture on sexually transmitted infections of seamen in the 1900s. Laurent Misery (Brest) has studied the history of prostitution in Brest.

The whole texts of all these lectures were published in *Nouvelles Dermatologiques* in 2004 and 20063-15.

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