

Derek Covington, M.D

Derek Covington, M.D.'11, was selected to accompany Diana Nyad on her most recent open water swim from Cuba to Miami after expressing his interest to a senior resident at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami where he is currently a third-year anesthesiology resident.

“The senior resident had served as one of her two physicians during a previous unsuccessful attempt. When he asked if I wanted to go on this swim, I said absolutely,” said Covington, who is an active technical SCUBA diver and instructor. He regularly does deep Trimix wreck dives off the coast of Florida and teaches the skill to people from the University of Miami School of Medicine/Jackson Memorial Hospital, including attending physicians, resident physicians, nurses and medical students.

“I am constantly talking about my diving and many in the Department of Anesthesiology were in support of me accompanying her,” Covington said.

The medical duties for Covington and the other accompanying physician, John Kot, M.D., were to support Nyad’s swimming endeavor by making it as safe as possible for her and all her crew members, including kayakers, shark divers, boat captains, trainers and social media representatives.

“We were most concerned with dehydration, anaphylaxis, recalcitrant nausea and vomiting, and jellyfish stings. Although remote, we knew there was a risk of serious medical injury. Thus, we were prepared with all of the medications and equipment for ACLS, including epinephrine, atropine, bicarbonate, and supplies to establish a secure airway,” Covington explained.

“Diana was remarkable and only required a medication for nausea and one for the swelling of her lips, tongue and cheeks. However, we did treat a few of the crew members for nausea and one for extreme dehydration, which required an IV for intravascular fluid resuscitation.”

When Nyad arrived at Key West, Florida, a stretcher and EMS were ready for her.

“After a brief, celebration and embrace from her trainer, we placed an IV and accompanied her to the ambulance, which took her to a local hospital. She was discharged a few hours later in good condition,” Covington said.

As part of her support crew, Covington and others based were on a catamaran, one of the many support vessels that accompanies Nyad during her swims.

“We would spend many hours on the navigation boat to see her during her swim breaks and monitor her condition. When we needed rest, we were taken back to the catamaran by small taxi boats,” Covington added.

After residency, Covington wants to pursue fellowship training in underwater and hyperbaric medicine.

“In addition enjoying pertinent clinical and research activities in hyperbaric medicine, I hope to continue teaching SCUBA diving on a regular basis as I find it extremely rewarding and a wonderful balance to the demanding practice of medicine,” he said.