

Tombstoning

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Aim: A young man was admitted to the ward with serious injuries acquired while ‘tombstoning’. Several of his friends were also airlifted to a nearby intensive care unit. This led us to conduct a literature review in order to analyse the risks and injuries associated with this activity.

Tombstoning is an unregulated activity whereby individuals jump or dive from a height, often sea-cliffs, piers or bridges into water. The aim is to enter the water upright and straight, like a tombstone.

Methods: We used the pubmed search terms ‘tombstoning’ and ‘cliff jumping’. We also used newspaper articles and analysed their data sources.

Results: There were very few specific tombstoning injuries reported in the medical literature, however there were many reports in the ‘popular press’ and ‘social media’. Tombstoning is a popular activity amongst thrill seeking adolescents across the world, and is deemed to be a high-risk, high-impact activity, being described as a ‘dare-devil activity’ or ‘deadly craze’. It may be difficult for jumpers to gauge water depth which can be unpredictable and alter with the tide, being shallower than initially thought submerged objects such as rocks or other sharp objects may not be visible and may cause serious impact injuries. Cold water shock can make it difficult to swim and strong currents can rapidly sweep people away. Many are persuaded to jump as a result of peer pressure and may do so under the influence of alcohol or drugs, which may further affect judgement, and ability to get out of the water. Trying stunts may make the practice more perilous news reports frequently recount life-changing injuries (head, neck, limb, spinal), many occurring in teenagers. In the UK there have been over 20 fatalities since 2005, with many more requiring an emergency response

Conclusion: Tombstoning is a potentially dangerous activity. Health professionals should educate adolescents about its potential risks – ‘don’t jump into the unknown’ and ‘consider the dangers before you take the plunge’.

Biography

Michael Allen is an author of Emergency Medicine SHO in Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust, United Kingdom.