SASOHN Port Natal hosted the 34th Annual Conference and AGM in Durban on 12 – 14 November 2014. The conference was preceded by three workshops facilitated by experts in the field. The Mental State Examination workshop was facilitated by Mrs Mary Ann Jarvis, a Mental Health Nursing specialist from the Faculty of Nursing and Public Health at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN); Disability in the Workplace was facilitated by Mr Nevil Balkrishna from the Disability Unit at UKZN, and Chemicals and Agricultural workers was facilitated by Dr Saloshni Naidoo from the Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health at UKZN. All three workshops were very favourably received by SASOHN members.

The conference had the theme of industrial medicine practice interventions and included a varied programme of speakers. Dr Mzimkhulu Zungu from the National Institute for Occupational Health gave the keynote address entitled An Occupational Health System within Primary Health Care in South Africa. The main health reforms for occupational health in the health system include the provision of essential workers’ health services within primary health care (PHC) and the strengthening of the public health system in order to:

1. Provide health care workers (HCWs) with knowledge and skills to respond to the specific health needs of workers in their catchment areas
2. Improve quality, effectiveness and community outreach on workers’ health
3. Ensure continuity of care and appropriate referral pathways for workers’ health within the public health system

Dr Ivan Niranjan, an occupational hygienist from Durban University of Technology, spoke about the combined effects of chemicals and noise on hearing. Dr Niranjan’s take home message was that, currently, there are gaps in the legislation in that employers are not required to conduct audiometric monitoring of workers who are exposed to ototoxic chemicals or who are taking medication that is ototoxic. The principle should be, in a complex occupational environment that includes noise and ototoxic chemicals, hearing protectors should be supplied to workers exposed to noise levels of 80 dBA.

Dr Wendy Lewis, an occupational health nurse practitioner (OHNP), presented a paper on thermal stress in the workplace, with an emphasis on cold stress. Dr Lewis discussed both the physiological effects of cold on the human body and the sociocultural perceptions of cold in the work place. Normal human comfort levels and health conditions caused or aggravated by cold temperatures were clarified, including how cold is too cold, myths and facts. This was discussed using case studies within the framework of South African legislation.

Mrs Penny Reimers, a midwife, community and OHNP, and international board certified lactation consultant who currently works for the Department of Paediatrics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal as a researcher and lactation consultant, presented Supporting Employed Women to Successfully Breastfeed. A study in the US found that, without support, most women stopped breastfeeding within a month of returning to work.1 When mothers received support, they were able to continue to breastfeed for longer and some even exceeded their breastfeeding goals.1 Therefore, women need support from the time they start breastfeeding and on an ongoing basis. Mrs Reimers urged OHNPs to implement support for breastfeeding in their workplaces and cited the successful programme in place at Unilever in Durban.

Mrs Michelle Baker, a psychologist in Kloof in Durban with a particular interest in sleep disorders, presented Sleep and Shift Work which addressed “normal” sleep, shift work disorder and the associated features of the disorder within the framework of the 3-P model and the biopsychosocial models. Her talk explored the physiological impact and more complex ramifications, such as other sleep disorders and/or medical disorders.

Ms Juliet Houghton, the country director for CHIVA-Africa, a charity working in the area of children, youth and...
HIV, spoke about Transitioning Youth from Paediatric Care to Adult Care in the Workplace.

Key messages from Ms Houghton’s presentation were:
1. This isn’t your own adolescence: avoid assumptions
2. You are not their parent; you are not their friend
3. You don’t have to be ‘cool’ or know all of the current adolescent culture
4. You do have to listen
5. Building knowledge and skills of healthcare workers enables quality service provision
6. Quality service provision requires comprehensive communication skills
7. Ultimately, we need to be able to say what we mean

A poster presentation was held with five submissions (small, but a start) and was very well received by delegates. Mr Anivesh Singh of Ripple Effect (Micromega) donated a very generous prize for the poster presentations. First prize went to Mrs Pam Scott for her poster on Occupational Health in Thatchers. The posters were adjudicated by four SASOHN members from different regions.

Delegates were treated to a colourful programme of entertainment: a Magic Cocktail Party with Mo Magic on Wednesday night, generously sponsored by Neil Schalkwyk, and the gala dinner, a vibrant affair with delegates donning traditional wear and representing the rainbow nation!

President Kim Davies and SASOHN Port Natal would like to thank all the delegates, sponsors and health and safety industry partners for ensuring that the conference and AGM was a resounding success.

REFERENCES

Report prepared by Penny Orton, SASOHN Education Representative, email: pennyo@dut.ac.za