

From the Editor . . .



**Gill Nelson,
Editor-in-Chief**

Welcome to the second, autumn issue of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* of 2017. We have a mix of original research and opinion articles, as well as some interesting up-to-date occupational health news.

Karen Michel and Laetitia Rispel, in their paper on governance of occupational healthcare services in South Africa, report that these services “occupy a relatively low priority on the health reform agenda”. In mid-2016, Myers et al. published a letter to the editor in the South

African Medical Journal, calling for the incorporation of occupational (and environmental) health in the National Public Health Institute of South Africa (NAPHISA) Bill.¹ The letter also listed the ideal functions of a National Public Health Institute delivering occupational health and safety services. The draft Bill was published in November 2015, and we eagerly await the revised Bill which we believe now incorporates occupational health. We hope that this will go a long way to focusing attention on occupational health services going forward.

Mortality statistics released by Statistics South Africa at the end of February this year showed that over half (55.5%) of deaths in 2015 were attributed to non-communicable diseases. While tuberculosis remained the leading cause of death in 2015 (accounting for more than 7% of all deaths), deaths due to non-communicable diseases were not far behind: diabetes mellitus accounted for 5.4% of deaths, closely followed by cerebrovascular diseases (such as stroke) at 5.0% of deaths. Despite this, many people survive strokes which “often strike down the victim in their productive years of life, removing the breadwinner from families”.³ Hence, the paper by Veronica Ntsiea and Helen van Aswegen on enablers of, and barriers to, returning to work for stroke victims, is particularly important. The novelty of this paper lies in the fact that perspectives of employers were sought, in addition to stroke victims themselves.

A decade ago, the UN General Assembly declared 25 March the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Resolution 62/122 of 17 December 2007). It is therefore fitting that we are publishing the first of David Stanton's papers on slavery in this issue. There will be several papers following this one.

Chris van Selm has written his second opinion article, this time on formal and informal referral processes; the first article, on conflict resolution, appeared in the previous issue of the Journal. We were pleased to hear that Dr van Selm received lots of positive feedback from his occupational health colleagues in Swaziland. We hope that they will be encouraged to read future issues of the Journal, and submit papers of their own.

The letter to the editor, which draws our attention to South Africa's stance on supporting the listing of chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous



Anti-asbestos lobbying in New York. Photo: Gill Nelson

chemical in terms of the Rotterdam Convention, will surely elicit comment from some of our readers.

As usual, the Societies have news aplenty – both past and future. For planned events, please refer to the Events pages. There are some exciting conferences coming up – both locally and internationally. Unfortunately, the MMPA was unable to submit a page for this issue. We appeal to all MMPA members to support their Association; membership numbers are dwindling. The MMPA, which was originally the Mine Medical Officers' Association (MMOA) is the oldest of the four societies, and needs our support.

Please continue to support your students in their research and encourage them to publish, so that we can grow the next generation of occupational health researchers. For those of you who are students, please take advantage of the support systems that are available, and ask for assistance when you need it.

REFERENCES

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3. Bizcommunity. Chronic diseases news. Shock statistics on heart disease and stroke in South Africa. Sep 4, 2007. Available at: <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/154/17763.html> (accessed 27 Mar 2017).
4. United Nations. International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/slave-trade.shtml> (accessed 27 Mar 2017).