

Wits School of Public Health hosts occupational health seminar



From L to R: Ms Claudina Nogueira (SASOM and SAIOH), Mr Deon Jansen van Vuuren (SAIOH), Ms Angie Butkovic (SASOHN), Dr Thomas Fuller (guest presenter from the USA), Ms Karen Michell (SASOHN), Dr Jenny Sapire (SASOM Secretary), Prof. Daan Kocks (SASOM Chair), Ms Milly Ruiters (DoL), and Ms Alta Kruger (SASOHN)

Photograph: Duschanka Hitzeroth

Under the auspices of the 'Occupational Health Forum' of the Department of Labour (DoL), the Wits School of Public Health (SoPH) hosted an occupational health seminar on Monday, 17 July 2017, in the Resource Centre. The seminar, consisting of two presentations by a visiting academic, was supported and endorsed by three sister organisations in occupational health, viz. the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM), the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH), and the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN). The seminar was accredited for CPD points (SAIOH – 0.2 CPD points) and CEUnits (South African Medical Association (SAMA) – 2 CPD points, Level 1 Clinical).

The guest speaker, Dr Thomas Fuller, is Associate Professor of the Safety programme of Illinois State University, USA, and has a very impressive CV and academic track record. Prof. Fuller is a certified industrial hygienist (CIH) and certified safety professional (CSP) with over 35 years of experience in occupational safety, industrial hygiene, infection control, environmental management, and public health. He has experience in healthcare, nuclear power plants, labour organisations, biopharmaceutical labs, manufacturing, and universities. Prof. Fuller is past Chair of the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) Non-ionising Radiation Committee. He is also a member of the Healthcare Working Group, Publications Committee, and a founding member of the AIHA Pandemic Planning Team. He is the Chair of the AIHA International Affairs Committee and AIHA Ambassador to France. He is a member of Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB) and a Contributing Editor for the American Journal of Nursing. He is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the National Safety Council and past President of the Board of Directors of the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health. Prof. Fuller is the AIHA representative to the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA) and was recently admitted to the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH).

The seminar was opened by the Head of the Wits SoPH, Dr Tobias Chirwa, who welcomed the participants and introduced Prof. Thomas Fuller, who was in Johannesburg for a short time after conducting occupational health and safety training in Botswana, in his capacity of trainer and representative of WHWB. Prior to his training in Botswana, Prof. Fuller had visited the National Institute

for Occupational Health (NIOH) in Johannesburg, where he delivered a presentation, toured the facilities and met with staff of the Occupational Hygiene Section, to discuss potential avenues for future collaboration.

The first presentation of the seminar, 'Global issues in occupational safety and health', focused on the growing need for qualified occupational safety and health (OSH) practitioners who can navigate cultural, technical, and regulatory challenges that arise as OSH becomes more and more linked to the survival and sustainability of enterprises and nations. It became very clear that communication is the key to providing safe and healthy workplaces to everyone, in every nation. This first presentation served as a stepping stone for discussion, possible collaborations, and development of ideas for ways to share experiences and new solutions to persisting and emerging workplace hazards.

The second presentation, 'Innovations in industrial hygiene approaches to infection control', discussed the latest advances in infectious agent identification and control in healthcare, and other settings. Infectious diseases remain a significant cause of morbidity and even fatality in healthcare workers around the world, and much more needs to be done to control these hazardous agents and protect these workers from exposure. The presentation detailed new methods for environmental air and surface monitoring; advances in respiratory protection and other personal protective equipment; new improvements in hospital ventilation systems to control airborne infectious agents; and reviewed benefits and practical limitations to the use of fumigation for hospital rooms. This presentation is accessible on the SASOM website (<http://www.sasom.org/2017/07/17/industrial-hygiene-innovations-in-infection-control/>).

Prof. Gillian Nelson, Associate Professor at the Wits SoPH and Head of the Occupational Health Division, delivered the vote of thanks and closed the seminar, which was followed by a light lunch and refreshments, offering seminar participants the opportunity to meet Prof. Fuller and network with other OSH professionals from various sectors. SASOM and SAIOH sponsored the cost of the lunch and refreshments for the 85 delegates who attended the seminar. The 'Occupational Health Forum' takes this opportunity to thank Prof. Nelson and her staff for graciously offering to host the seminar, and for all the logistical support they provided to make the seminar possible, and successful.

Contribution by:

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