

SASOM 2018 Annual General Meeting and Conference



The South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) Western Cape Chapter hosted the SASOM Annual General Meeting (AGM) and associated Conference at the Protea Hotel by Marriott, in Stellenbosch, Western Cape, on 24 November 2018.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

The Conference brought together close to 80 delegates, presenters, session chairs, organisers and exhibitors, under the theme of 'Research informs action', and was accredited for six Continuing Education Units (CEUnits) by the South African Medical Association (SAMA). The last SASOM ExCo meeting of the year was held on Friday evening, 23 November, and the AGM followed the close of the conference, on Saturday 24 November.

Dr Gregory Kew, Chair of the SASOM Western Cape Chapter and main organiser of the scientific programme, officially opened the Conference and welcomed all participants.

The first session was chaired by Dr Amy Burdzik, an occupational medicine specialist from the University of Cape Town (UCT), who introduced the first four presenters.

Emeritus Professor Rodney Ehrlich, a Senior Research Scholar from the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at UCT, gave the opening presentation, titled 'Grappling with the question: what is an occupational disease?' As eloquent as always, Prof. Ehrlich gave a comprehensive account of the legal definition of 'occupational disease' being an important

component of both primary protection of workers and their social security. He expanded on the special niche that occupational medicine practitioners have in terms of understanding the relevant toxicology and exposure-response relationships, in combination with an understanding of the rule of presumption and burden of proof in compensation systems. These aspects become more complex in light of the blurring of boundaries that exists between occupational disease, public health, and work-health economics.

The second presentation, titled 'Ethics in occupational health practice', was delivered by Dr Izak Loftus, Senior Partner and Chief Operating Officer at PathCare Laboratories, Somerset West. Dr Loftus described how medical ethics have become pivotal to medical practice, and that they play an important role in the doctor-patient relationship. He covered basic principles of biomedical ethics, the interaction with legislation, and professional rules of conduct; and alluded to the Code of Ethics of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH). In occupational health, there are unique ethical dilemmas that go beyond medical ethics, as is the case when dealing with issues of dual or multiple loyalties.

Dr WAJ (Jack) Meintjes, an occupational medicine senior specialist at Stellenbosch University and Tygerberg Academic Hospital, followed with a presentation, titled 'Physiological cardiorespiratory changes with immersion and diving'. He reviewed the 'normal physiological responses' associated



'Rose amongst the thorns' – Dr Gregory Kew - occupational medicine specialist, Chair of the SASOM Western Cape Chapter, and main organiser of the Conference – is flanked by the two session chairs, Dr Shamila Fakie (left) and Dr Amy Burdzik (right), both occupational medicine specialists from the Cape Province

Photograph: Claudina Nogueira



'To the victor, the spoils' – Dr Sophie Kisting (right), Executive Director of the NIOH, receives her prize from Ms Cheryl-Ann Buirski of PathCare, the exhibitor company that donated a 'potjie' hamper for a raffle at the Conference

Photograph: Claudina Nogueira

with immersion and diving, and illustrated these by means of video material of actual diving incidents, which held the audience's attention and led to an animated discussion. As a specialist advisor on various national and international professional platforms related to diving, he presented his own personal experience and involvement in numerous case studies over the years, highlighting the potential impact that workplace exposures associated with diving can have on the health and safety of employees.

Prof. Mohamed Jeebhay, Head of the Occupational Medicine Division of the School of Public Health and Family Medicine at UCT, delivered the last presentation of the morning session, titled 'Recent developments in occupational asthma research'. Drawing on his expertise and vast research experience in occupational allergy, he discussed various clinical and epidemiological approaches to identifying important environmental and host risk factors for occupational allergy and asthma in the South African setting. Prof. Jeebhay also presented studies highlighting preventive approaches that illustrated the effectiveness of exposure standards, workplace interventions, medical surveillance programmes, and education and training of workers and managers.

The afternoon session was chaired by Dr Shamila Fakié, an occupational medicine practitioner in private practice. She introduced Dr Shahieda Adams, a senior lecturer and occupational medicine specialist in the Occupational Medicine Division at UCT and the Western Cape Department of Health. Her presentation, titled 'Occupational cancer: a leading cause of work-related mortality', brought the message home that mortality from both cancer and occupational cancer is on the increase, in part due to longer life expectancy and decreases in other causes of mortality. Despite the rapid increase in the number of chemicals in the workplace and emerging occupational hazards, there has been a steady decline in the recognition of new carcinogens. There are specific epidemiological challenges related to the study of occupational cancer, making it difficult to ascertain true estimates of the disease burden. More specifically, data on the occupational cancer burden remain limited for low- and middle-income countries.

The next presentation, titled 'Workers' compensation for occupational tuberculosis (TB) in health workers (HWs) in South Africa: a survey and qualitative study', was delivered by Dr Nicholas (Nick) van de Water, a newly qualified occupational medicine specialist from UCT and the Western Cape Department of Health, and a SASOM ExCo member. Dr Van de Water discussed the findings of a case series of 300 claims for occupational TB in HWs sampled from an employer database, 51 of which presented for interviews. Since HWs face an increased risk of contracting TB, including drug-resistant forms, effective workers' compensation for occupational TB is vital. A total of 59% of interviewees reported the process of submitting cases for compensation to be marred by poor administration and communication by all parties. Only one interviewee had received all the compensation benefits to

which he/she was entitled; and the experience of contracting TB was marked by stigma, surprise and financial stress. This case series highlighted the numerous deficiencies that continue to plague the system of Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Disease (COID). Dedicated facility- or district-based occupational health units, with adequately trained staff trusted by employees, are required to support HWs who contract TB.

Dr Blanche Andrews, an occupational medicine registrar at Stellenbosch University and Tygerberg Academic Hospital, and an occupational medicine advisor at Sanlam, presented 'Hepatitis B vaccinations among employees at Tygerberg Academic Hospital'. She discussed findings from an exploratory retrospective descriptive study, which described hepatitis B vaccination and needlestick injury information for a six-year period (2009 to 2014), and explored the direct costs associated with hepatitis B vaccination. Dr Andrews concluded that initial direct cost estimations indicated that the pre-vaccination approach may need a larger budget, but this would need to be explored more thoroughly via a cost economic-analysis evaluation.

Ms Claudina Nogueira, SASOM ExCo member and ICOH Vice President for Scientific Committees (2018-2021), gave a short presentation on ICOH as a global occupational health professional society, and the benefits of ICOH membership. She also reminded the audience of the joint SASOM-MEDICHEM Conference (scientific programme under development) in Johannesburg, South Africa from 31 July to 3 August 2019; and the next ICOH Triennial Congress, ICOH2021, to be held in Melbourne, Australia, in March 2021. A number of conference delegates showed interest in becoming ICOH members, and completed application forms, taking advantage of the presence of ICOH members to endorse their applications.

Dr Gregory Kew closed the proceedings by thanking all delegates, presenters, exhibitors and co-organisers for the success of the Conference. SASOM is grateful to the following companies for exhibiting at and supporting the Conference: Amtronix (Pty) Ltd, Drug Detection Technology, eMoyoDot Global (Pty) Ltd, Homemed (Pty) Ltd, Med Distributors (Pty) Ltd, Occupational Therapy in Occupational Health (OTOH), PathCare, Prism Inter Africa (Prismia), Sanofi-Aventis South Africa (Pty) Ltd, and SSEM Mthembu Medical (Pty) Ltd.

SASOM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2018

At the AGM, Dr Jenny Sapire, SASOM National Secretary, highlighted the following activities and outcomes for the past year:

The elected SASOM office bearers for 2019 are: Prof. Daan Kocks (Chair), Dr André Kotzé (Vice Chair), Dr Jenny Sapire (Secretary), and Dr Adriaan Combrinck (Treasurer).

As at 31 October 2018, SASOM had 351 members in good standing, including nine honorary life members and

five corporate memberships. Honorary life membership was awarded to Drs Murray Coombs and Chris van Selm in 2018.

Ms Jenny Acutt retired at the end of March 2018. Mr Jaco Botha has been appointed as the SASOM National Project Coordinator. Contact details are unchanged.

The Department of Labour's (DOL's) 'Occupational Health Forum' continues to be active with Prof. Daan Kocks, Dr Jenny Sapire and Dr Adriaan Combrinck addressing needs, as they arise, with the other stakeholders, viz. the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN) and the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH). ExCo members, Prof. Kocks and Dr Funeka Ngcakani, are also members of the DoL Technical Committee tasked with redrafting the Hazardous Biological Agents Regulations.

Liaison with other organisations, on national, regional and international levels, is a continuous activity. Organisations include the International Occupational Medicine Society Collaborative (IOMSC), the African Regional Association of Occupational Health (ARAOH), Occupational Safety and Health Africa (OSHAfrica), the Council for Health Service Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSASA), the Compensation Commissioner (CC), the national DoL, and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Co-opted SASOM ExCo members report on activities of entities they represent, such as ICOH, the South African National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), the South African Society of Travel Medicine (SASTM), and the Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA).

ICOH's 32nd International Congress on Occupational Health (ICOH2018) was held in Dublin, Ireland, from Sunday 29 April to Friday 4 May 2018. SASOM sponsored (fully or partially) four ExCo members viz. Profs. Daan Kocks and Mary Ross, Dr Adriaan Combrinck, and Ms Claudina Nogueira to present/participate in the Congress which brought together more than 2 000 delegates from around the globe. SASOM renewed its affiliate membership of ICOH for the new triennium (2018-2021); Ms Nogueira was elected as an ICOH Officer in the post of Vice President of Scientific Committees; and Prof. Kocks is the new ICOH National Secretary (NS) for South Africa, succeeding Dr Adriaan Combrinck who served as the previous NS for two triennia (2012-2015; 2015-2018). Dr Combrinck received an ICOH special award for NSs for enrolling the most new ICOH members on the African continent.

SASOM endorsed the ICOH2018 Congress' international call to support the promotion of health strategies to prevent TB. On 26 September 2018, in New York City, USA, world leaders endorsed the United Nations (UN) Political Declaration on TB, 'United to end TB: An urgent global response to a global epidemic'. Due to intense efforts over the past year by ICOH and other partner organisations, the

suggested language related to TB in workers was successfully included in the endorsed UN Declaration which now identifies 'healthcare workers, miners and others exposed to silica' as high-risk vulnerable groups.

The SASOM Annual Congress, themed 'Occupational Health - Looking back to move forward: Old lessons inform solutions for new issues', with the participation of a record number of exhibitor organisations, was held on 22 and 23 June 2018 at the Protea Hotel by Marriott, Kempton Park, Gauteng. The Congress was attended by 150 participants, including delegates, invited speakers and session chairs.

SASOM was invited to participate in the SAIOH 2018 Annual Conference in October; Prof. Daan Kocks presented on 'Organising of occupational medicine practitioners in southern Africa'.

A new interactive and dynamic SASOM website was launched on 5 October to replace the previous outdated version. Mr Jaco Botha, SASOM National Project Coordinator, initiated the process with a newly appointed web designer and the support of Prof. Daan Kocks and Dr Adriaan Combrinck. The previous version was not able to cater for special needs, such as 'membership only' login, complimentary individual access to the SASOM Guidelines in electronic format (only for members in good standing), and public/general access to FAQs and contemporary updated occupational medicine/health information.

SASOM MEMBERSHIP FOR 2019

SASOM members are reminded that the renewal of their annual membership (or the submission of new applications) is due by 31 January 2019 to ensure receipt of all the *Occupational Health Southern Africa* journal issues for the year. Access to the 'Members Area' on the SASOM website will also only be granted to paid-up members with effect from 1 February 2019. Please access the website for more information: www.sasom.org.

Visit www.occhealth.co.za to see more photographs from this event.

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