

News from the global occupational health arena

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The ICOH2022 Congress will be fully virtual

The International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) is pleased to announce that the ICOH 33rd International Congress on Occupational Health (ICOH2022) will be held in a fully virtual format from 6 to 10 February 2022.

In consideration of the exceptional and unprecedented circumstances brought about by the COVID-19 global pandemic, the ICOH2022 Congress will be organised by ICOH with the support of the Australian National Organising Committee (NOC) in the role of co-organisers. The ICOH2021 Congress was to have been held in Melbourne, Australia, in March 2021. Shortly after the onset of the global pandemic, in April 2020, the Congress was initially postponed for one year, along with the extension of the current triennium (four years instead of the usual three). Over the past few months, and following numerous discussions between the ICOH management and the Australian NOC, it was mutually agreed, and approved by the ICOH board, that the now renamed ICOH2022 Congress will be a fully virtual event.

ICOH and the Congress organisers are working diligently to adapt and streamline the programme to fit within a virtual platform framework. The aim is to ensure that this first-ever ICOH virtual congress will offer the same high-quality experience as the in-presence events to which participants have become accustomed, in terms of scientific content and interaction, with networking and engagement opportunities for all participants. The virtual format will ensure wider accessibility as it will offer the global occupational safety and health (OSH) community the opportunity of participating at reduced registration fees, without the need for international travel and the associated costs. This virtual format will be especially advantageous for participants from developing countries. Many of the sessions will be pre-recorded and available on demand to paid-up participants for some time after the Congress, allowing delegates to access sessions at their convenience.

A new announcement for the ICOH2022 Congress is under development and will be shared with all ICOH members and other interested parties very soon, as well as postings and updates on social media, the ICOH website www.icohweb.org, and the official Congress website www.icoh2022.net.

Registration for EPICOH 2021 opened on 31 March

The ICOH Scientific Committee (SC) on Epidemiology in Occupational Health (EPICOH) has, as its main function, the promotion of communication among epidemiologists, industrial hygienists, and other occupational health scientists worldwide. EPICOH provides a forum for the discussion of issues unique to the study of health and work, and addresses topics such as occupational exposures, health effects, methodology, environment-gene interactions, and ethics and law.

The 28th International Symposium on Epidemiology in Occupational Health (EPICOH 2021) will be hosted virtually this year, from 25 to 28 October. The theme is *From the workplace to the population: Exposure and prevention* and the organisers will make use of a virtual conference platform that will allow participants to experience the live sessions and view recorded on-demand content at their convenience. The Symposium will enable networking with other participants in a variety of ways, including a networking lounge that will allow delegates to join friends and colleagues for face-to-face chats. As many members have expressed an interest in a hybrid meeting, the organising committee will continue to monitor the pandemic situation and evaluate whether the inclusion of some in-person features will be possible. More information can be found on the official EPICOH 2021 website: <https://face2face.events/epicoh2021>.

ICOH Scientific Committees and the ASSP India Chapter join forces for a virtual event

The 9th American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP) India Chapter Professional Development Conference was held virtually on 28 and 29 April 2021. The following ICOH SCs collaborated with the ASSP India Chapter and the University of Calcutta to deliver an engaging event, themed *Promoting sustainability and social well-being through excellence in OSH*: SC on Occupational Health in the Construction Industry (SC OHICI); SC on Rural Health: Agriculture, Pesticides and Organic Dusts; SC on Small Scale Enterprises and the Informal Sector; and SC on Occupational Health and Development. Sub-themes included 'Vision Zero', digital technology, mental health, and sustainability. There were also technical sessions organised by each of the ICOH SCs.

Ms Claudina Nogueira (ICOH vice president for SCs and SASOM ExCo member) was invited by the conference organisers to co-chair the first session of the second day with Dr Kalyan Brata Saha, and to officially launch the book of abstracts. The chair of the SC OHICI and main organiser, Dr Krishna Nirmalya Sen, and his team are to be congratulated on a successful, well-organised virtual conference and an excellent compilation of abstracts, especially during such a trying pandemic situation in India, where the commitment and passion for OSH and the wellbeing of workforces continue to be evident.

'Vulnerable workers and COVID-19: Insights from a survey of members of the ICOH'

Members of the ICOH SC on Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Health, chaired by Dr Minha Rajput-Ray (UK), conducted a study to determine whether occupational health professionals thought that the COVID-19 pandemic might further disadvantage any particular group(s) of vulnerable workers globally and, if so, which group(s).

A cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of occupational

health professionals using an online questionnaire, which was shared via e-mail within the ICOH community. The data were collected and analysed in 2020 (165 responses from 52 countries) and the findings were published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* in early 2021. The survey respondents most often identified workers with job insecurity (i.e. those in precarious employment or in the informal sector) as the disadvantaged groups likely to suffer further detriment due to COVID-19. The authors concluded that occupational health professionals play a key role and have a moral duty to encourage policies that improve social justice and reduce inequalities. The full article can be accessed online at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18010346>.

News from the SASOM national office

The South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) electronic communication system improved by facilitating the member access process to the digital publication of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* (OHSA), via a link to the Journal website on the SASOM website. Members can now complete an electronic version of the CEU/CPD questionnaire for each issue, which replaces the previous hardcopy version that was distributed via bulk mailing with each issue when the Journal was published in a printed format.

Several SASOM members are involved with development endeavours for government policy, and providing advice on occupational health practitioner (OHP) and occupational medicine practitioner (OMP) norms and practices related to Incident/Accident Investigation Procedures and Regulations on Hazardous Biological Agents to the Department of Employment and Labour; and Workplace COVID-19 Vaccination Programme Planning with the National Department of Health (NDoH). Special mention and thanks are noted for the facilitator role played by the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) under the leadership of Dr Spo Kgalomono, NIOH executive director and SASOM ExCo member. Dr Kgalomono initiated the involvement of the Society with the NDoH, and a very successful webinar was hosted on 8 May 2021, by the NIOH, to address the numerous questions raised by OHPs and OMPs on registering as COVID-19 vaccination providers, at the request of SASOM.

The final draft of a new SASOM guideline, titled 'Spirometry in the Workplace', was approved by the SASOM ExCo. The guideline is based on European Union and USA pulmonology standards; the next step in the process is to seek buy-in from the South African Thoracic Society (SATS).

SASOM chair, Prof. Daan Kocks, was invited to present at the 15th Academic Day of the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN) on 6 May 2021. The hybrid event, held to coincide with Nurses' Week (6–12 May 2021), was themed *Nurses transforming the workplace*. Prof. Kocks' presentation, 'Dealing with ethical challenges in occupational health', was delivered virtually.

SASOM contributed to a paper titled 'Work-related injuries and diseases and COVID-19', authored by ICOH management, at the invitation of the International Labour Organization (ILO), to be published in the *International Journal of Labour Research* (IJLR). SASOM ExCo members, Prof. Daan Kocks and Ms Claudina Nogueira, contributed sections titled 'Experiences of COVID-19: South Africa' and 'Some lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic'.

SASOM renewed its memorandum of understanding (MoU) with MEDICHEM for the provision of secretarial and administrative support for a second year. The MoU between the two parties stipulates

secretarial support for the MEDICHEM treasurer and the chair of the ICOH SC on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry (previously known as ICOH SC MEDICHEM).

As at the end of 2020, the SASOM database comprised 470 individual members.

The SASOM ExCo welcomes new faces

Mr Jaco Botha, SASOM national office coordinator, resigned at the end of February and relocated to New Zealand at the end of March. SASOM would like to officially welcome Mrs Claudia Frost, who took over as national office coordinator on 1 April 2021, and wish her well in the new post.

SASOM welcomes Dr Carmen Whyte as the recently-appointed SASOM secretary. Dr Whyte is a public health medicine physician working at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria, with a focus on the control and prevention of diseases within communities and groups, through health promotion, education and research. Dr Whyte holds the following qualifications: MBChB (UKZN) 2006; DCH (CMSA) 2009; Dip HIV Mx (CMSA) 2011; FCPHM (CMSA) 2015; MMed Community Health (Wits) 2015; and DOMP (UP) 2020. Her work in the field includes identifying and addressing current and emerging public health issues. Dr Whyte's interests include occupational medicine and occupational health, ranging from disease-specific programmes to broader aspects of employee wellness and assistance. SASOM is pleased to have Dr Whyte on board and wishes her all of the best in her role as secretary.



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Photograph: courtesy of SASOM