

# Report on the ICOH mid-term meeting: Rome, Italy, 11–13 February 2020

**Claudina Nogueira**, Occupational health consultant/Project manager, University of Pretoria (South Africa)

ICOH vice president: Scientific Committees (2018–2021), WHWB board member, SASOM ExCo member, e-mail: claudinanogueira@hotmail.com

**Daan Kocks**, SASOM chair and ICOH national secretary for South Africa, e-mail: info@sasom.org

**Jaco Botha**, Project co-ordinator in the SASOM national office, e-mail: info@sasom.org

Founded in 1906 in Milan, Italy, as the Permanent Commission on Occupational Health, today the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) is the world's leading international scientific society in the field of occupational health, with a membership of approximately 2 000 professionals from 105 countries ([www.icohweb.org](http://www.icohweb.org)). ICOH's main objective is to foster the scientific progress, knowledge and development of occupational health and safety in all its aspects. The flagship of the ICOH activities is the triennial World Congress on Occupational Health, usually attended by approximately 3 000 participants. ICOH has 37 Scientific Committees (SCs) and five Working Groups (WGs), most of which hold their own symposia, conferences and workshops; produce scientific monographs; and review the abstracts that are submitted to the international congresses. Mid-term meetings are held in the periods between the ICOH congresses, and these are attended by the ICOH officers, board members, and the chairs or secretaries of the SCs and WGs, with the aim of discussing the ongoing activities of ICOH, and the progress made in terms of the ICOH work plan for the specific triennium.

The ICOH mid-term meeting for the current triennium (2018–2021) was held from 11 to 13 February 2020 in Italy, against the backdrop of the rich tapestry of culture, ancient history, art, architecture and beauty that is '**Bella Roma**'.

## INAIL HOSTS THE ICOH MID-TERM MEETING

The ICOH mid-term meeting was organised and hosted by the Rome headquarters of the Italian Workers' Compensation Authority (INAIL – Istituto Nazionale Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro) which houses the ICOH secretariat. The INAIL is a government entity with its main objective being to safeguard workers against physical injuries

and occupational diseases. The INAIL is responsible for research in the fields of work accident prevention, safety at the workplace, and health in the living and working environments. Worker protection has increasingly taken on the characteristics of an integrated system of protection, ranging from preventive actions at the workplace to medical services and financial assistance, to rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of workplace accidents or professional diseases, to social life and work.

The meeting venue was the INAIL Palazzo at 144 Via IV Novembre in central Rome, originally built and inaugurated in 1932 as a theatre of impressive architecture with a monumental façade, massive staircases, an internal courtyard and terraced front. The building was recently renovated and houses various companies, including the INAIL headquarters.

Occupational health practitioners from South Africa play an essential role in ICOH activities as evidenced by two executive committee members of the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) participating in the ICOH mid-term meeting: Ms Claudina Nogueira, ICOH vice president for SCs, and Dr Adriaan Combrinck, secretary of the ICOH SC on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry (and treasurer of MEDICHEM). The meeting was also attended by a third South African, Ms Kim Davies, chair of the SC on Occupational Health Nursing and past president of the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN).

## Day one, 11 February 2020

The mid-term meeting started with the joint meeting of the ICOH officers, board and SCs and was attended by close to 50 participants; the officers' meeting was held the previous afternoon. The joint meeting opened with the report from the ICOH president, Dr Jukka Takala, and was followed by reports on the SCs (Ms Claudina Nogueira, ICOH vice



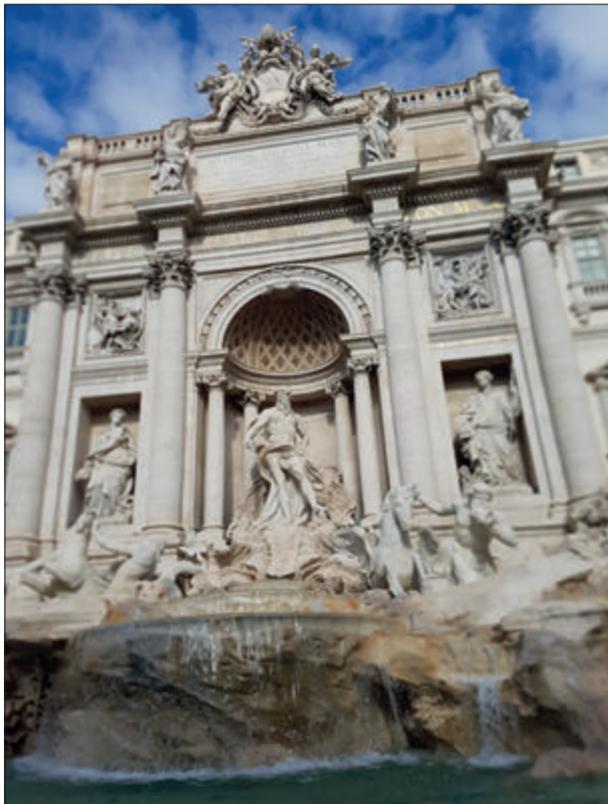
**Approximately 50 participants attended the ICOH mid-term meeting, 11–13 February 2020, in Rome, Italy**

*Photograph: Courtesy of ICOH secretariat (Italy)*

president) and the activities on the National Secretaries (Prof. Seong-Kyu Kang, ICOH vice president), and the report by the secretary general, Prof. Sergio Iavicoli. The meeting participants then broke up into groups for discussion and feedback on three topics, viz. i) increasing collaboration among SCs, ii) increasing the visibility of SC work and transfer of SC outputs to the ICOH repository, and iii) optimisation of management for SCs.

A general discussion on the way forward for SCs followed, emanating from the ideas that emerged. Prof. Malcolm Sim, president of the ICOH2021 Congress, then shared updates on the organisation of the event which will be hosted by the Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine (ANZSOM). He stated that the second announcement would be disseminated shortly after the mid-term meeting, with information on plenary speakers, fees, etc. The scientific programme is being developed with the participation and suggestions of the ICOH SCs. Prof. Sim's presentation included a showcase of the congress venue, the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The day ended with a visit to 'Welcome to Rome', a novel multimedia experience that allows one to dive into 2 700 years of history of the 'Eternal City' via interactive activities consisting of holograms and images, with video projections on the walls, ceilings and floors accompanied by a narrative voice that describes the unique story of Rome. This unusual visitors' experience of the city was followed by the official ICOH mid-term meeting social dinner at Al Pompiere Restaurant, where a sumptuous feast of traditional Roman cuisine was served.



**'Fontana di Trevi' – Rome's iconic Trevi Fountain, intricately carved in the Baroque style out of travertine stone sourced from nearby Tivoli, depicts Oceanus, God of Water, in the centre niche, flanked by Abundance and Salubrity. The central feature of the monument is a chariot in the shape of a shell, drawn by seahorses with Triton as their guide**

*Photograph: Claudina Nogueira (South Africa)*



*Photograph:  
Dr Rafael de la Hoz (USA)*

**South African presence at the ICOH mid-term meeting – L to R: Claudina Nogueira (ICOH vice president and SASOM ExCo member), Dr Adriaan Combrinck (secretary of the ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry and SASOM ExCo member), and Kim Davies (chair of the Scientific Committee on Occupational Health Nursing and past president of SASOHN)**

### **Day two, 12 February 2012**

#### ***International Conference on 'Future of Work: Challenges and Opportunities for Occupational Health and Safety'***

The half-day conference, organised by ICOH and the INAIL, with the patronage of the Municipality of Rome, was held at the magnificent Protomoteca Hall of the Campidoglio, at the Piazza del Campidoglio – a masterpiece of Renaissance architecture, designed by Michaelangelo. The Piazza was laid down on the summit of the Capitoline Hill, the most important of Rome's seven hills. The Piazza's popularity is also due to its proximity to the Capitoline Museums and the legendary sculpture of the 'Capitoline Wolf', the bronze she-wolf on top of the column which is a replica of the original statue housed in the Capitoline Museums.

The conference was opened by the Mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi, and brought together international experts who addressed the challenges of a changing world of work, with a special focus on demographic changes (particularly ageing workforces and migrants), rapid technological development, and changes in labour markets especially owing to new ways of performing jobs. Occupational health and safety, as a discipline, needs to keep abreast of these ever-changing work scenarios by taking advantage of opportunities while managing new needs and complexities introduced by technological innovation. The presentations provided detailed analyses of the current context and discussed future perspectives for the aforementioned fields. The various keynote presenters and panel discussion members were representatives of organisations such as the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, the European Commission, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH, USA), the University of São Paulo, Brazil, the Italian Society of Occupational Medicine, the BioRobotics Institute of the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa, the Italian Institute of Technology, the Italian Ministries of Labour and Health, the World Health Organization (WHO), the INAIL, and ICOH.

In recent years, the INAIL's research has increasingly focused on identifying and managing emerging risks related to new organisational models of work and the evolution of production processes following the introduction of new technologies. ICOH also has dedicated WGs on the future of decent work, and demographic changes and occupational health. Hence, the conference was an opportunity for high-level debate and discussion on the drivers and barriers of a changing world of work.

#### ***First ICOH board meeting***

The first ICOH board meeting was held at the INAIL headquarters. The final contract between the National Organising Committee of the



ICOH2024 Congress and ICOH was formally signed before the beginning of the meeting. Prof. Abdeljalil El Kholti, President of the ICOH2024 Congress, presented an update on the congress organisation. The 34th ICOH International Congress will be jointly organised by the Moroccan Occupational Health Association (MOHA) and the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy of Casablanca, Hassan II University of Casablanca; and will be held in Marrakesh, Morocco from 28 April to 3 May 2024 with the theme: *Enhancing occupational health practices: Tackling the gap.*

The programme for the afternoon included reports from the task groups on membership (including the good performance of India, as the top country, both in terms of membership number and new members) and information and communication (with a focus on communication tools available to ICOH, including website, newsletter and social media platforms).

The following ICOH WGs also reported on their activities: Future of Decent Work; Demographic Changes and Occupational Health; Implementation of the Global Strategy of Occupational Health for All, with special reference to the global ban of asbestos; and Occupational Cancer.

### Day three, 13 February 2020

#### Second ICOH board meeting

The following reports were presented on the final day: WG on Occupational Infectious Agents; ICOH Finance Committee; ICOH Budget; and Task Group on Constitution, and Bye Laws and Guidelines. There was a session dedicated to election procedures for the next triennium, where the adoption of the electronic vote for the election procedures for the 2021–2024 triennium was unanimously approved. The remainder of the meeting time was dedicated to discussions on the following topics: relationships between ICOH and the international organisations, the International Labour Organization and WHO, as well as non-governmental organisations; a proposal for the appointment of ICOH honorary members; and the current ICOH strategy and future developments.

The meeting adjourned with the ICOH president thanking all attendees for their valuable contributions and active participation during the three days. A special vote of thanks and appreciation was extended to the ICOH secretariat staff for their tireless work in organising the ICOH mid-term meeting, and their support and able assistance to the ICOH officers, board members and chairs of the SCs and WGs.

## IMPACT OF THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

We are living in unprecedented times across the globe, where every country is experiencing the tragic and far-reaching impacts of the pandemic due to the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 that causes the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This situation and its impacts are anticipated to continue for many months/years to come, and to affect many sectors. Like so many other organisations, ICOH and SASOM have had to review their programmes for 2020 and 2021.

### Postponement of the ICOH2021 Congress

Following consultations between the ICOH2021 Congress organisers and the ICOH officers and board members, the next ICOH Congress (which would have taken place in March 2021) has been rescheduled to take place from 6 to 11 February 2022, at the same venue (Melbourne, Australia) and with the same theme, which has become even more apt: *Sharing solutions in occupational health: Locally, regionally, globally.*

Consequent to the postponement of the ICOH2021 Congress, the board took the decision to extend the current triennium (2018–2021) until February 2022. The mandates of the current officers, board, national secretaries and SC leadership (chairs and secretaries) will also be extended. More information and new deadlines for the ICOH2022 Congress will be published on the websites of the congress ([www.icoh2021.org](http://www.icoh2021.org)) and ICOH ([www.icohweb.org](http://www.icohweb.org)). This emergency situation has raised awareness of the importance of shared solutions and practices. ICOH and the congress organisers continue to work towards planning and hosting a successful congress in February 2022, and look forward to welcoming many participants in Melbourne.

### Postponement of the 7th International Conference on the History of Occupational and Environmental Health

The conference of the ICOH SC on History of Prevention of Occupational and Environmental Diseases, scheduled to be held in Durban, South Africa from 27 to 29 May 2020, has been postponed until 2022. More information will become available in due course.

### CHANGES TO SASOM'S SCHEDULES AND ACTIVITIES

The global pandemic has placed additional responsibilities and workloads on all practitioners involved in health services, in general, and

also on occupational health and medicine professionals who are required to ensure the safe return of workers to their respective workplaces and livelihoods, as the South African economy restarts in a phased approach, following the national lockdown.

The SASOM Annual Congress which was scheduled to take place in Pretoria at the end of July, will no longer be held this year. Under investigation is the possibility of hosting a one-day conference followed by the annual general meeting (AGM) in Pretoria at the end of the current year; more details will be communicated once there is clarity on the feasibility of a meeting. Virtual events are becoming the 'new normal' and SASOM is engaged in securing information about the hosting of webinars in future, including conferences and other nationwide CPD events.

The SASOM national office experienced an increase in activities during the last two quarters, also taking into account the requests for more information related to COVID-19. A review of the office workload and website statistics indicated a month-on-month increase in electronic and telephonic communications, inquiries pertaining to occupational medicine and health practices, and the number of unique website visitors (60% increase from January to April 2020), website visits (50% increase), and website page visits (15% increase).

The inquiries require expert opinions from SASOM members before responding. The positive feedback received from recipients confirms the consistently high standard of knowledge and expertise of SASOM's members. SASOM has continued to fulfil an invaluable role in keeping its members abreast of relevant information received from various stakeholders, pertaining particularly to issues related to COVID-19. In this regard, SASOM has circulated 82 e-mails and communiqués to members concerning aspects related to the pandemic.

SASOM's international footprint in occupational health is becoming more evident with the long-term administrative assistance being provided by the SASOM national office to the treasurer of MEDICHEM, who is also the secretary of the ICOH SC on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry, from March 2020.

The SASOM national office in Pretoria relocated to new premises in Montana at the end of February 2020, after being based in Meyerspark for many years. The new contact details will be shared with members once all logistical arrangements have been finalised.