

South African and ICOH presence at the 24th Annual Conference of the Society of Occupational Medicine of the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina

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24 Jornadas de Salud Ocupacional, the 24th Annual Conference of the Society of Occupational Medicine of the Province of Buenos Aires (*Sociedad de Medicina del Trabajo de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* – SMTBA) took place from 2 to 4 December 2020 at the Hotel Scala in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The conference, themed *Challenges and Opportunities of the New Normal*, offered its participants an excellent hybrid format programme that included a balanced mix of virtual and ‘real place – real time’ sessions and presentations, the majority of which were delivered in Spanish. Close to 100 presenters and a total of 552 delegates (537 national and 15 international) participated (virtually and on-site), representing Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, South Africa, Spain, and the United States of America.

This conference presented a challenge in terms of organisation and the call for participants. Throughout 2020, periodic virtual

meetings were held with every organiser, coordinator and speaker, at both national and international levels. Work agendas had to be prepared, respecting the different time zone of each speaker, in order to manage and organise update sessions, debates, working groups and symposia.

It is important to note that the *24 Jornadas de Salud Ocupacional* conference was a pioneer event in terms of its virtual transmission in Argentina, since it was the first conference to offer a combination of face-to-face and virtual formats, convening more than 10 Spanish-, English- and Portuguese-speaking countries. Protocols were adhered to for those participants who attended the conference in person.

- The distance between chairs was 2 m (79 inches).
- Wearing of facial masks was mandatory.
- Gel alcohol was used as sanitiser.
- Changeable protective plastic covers were placed on microphones, with additional sanitisation with 70% alcohol.
- Maximum capacity was maintained at 30%.
- Temperatures were measured and recorded at the entrance of the hotel.

On a global level, SMTBA is an affiliate member of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) and a scientific advisory body of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Regionally, SMTBA is a member of the Latin American Association of Occupational Health (*Asociación Latinoamericana de Salud Ocupacional* – ALSO).

Founded in November of 1982, SMTBA arose from the interest of a group of 48 specialist doctors who were concerned with workers’ health, and focused on three main objectives:

- to promote and maintain the health of people in relation to their work;
- to train specialists, teachers, researchers and leaders in the occupational health disciplines; and
- to provide support to occupational physicians across the country.



‘Five to tango’ – ‘Movers and shakers’ at the conference included (L to R): Drs Sandra Gaviola, Maria Cristina Pantano, Claudia De Hoyos, Samanta Kameniecki and Plinio Calvento



24 Jornadas de Salud Ocupacional

Retos y Oportunidades en la Nueva Normalidad



Today, SMTBA has approximately 345 members and boasts prestigious scientific trajectory and educational programmes of academic excellence through its Departments of Teaching, and Research and Scholarships.

Since 1983, SMTBA has published a printed version of an occupational health journal in Spanish (*Salud Ocupacional*, 101 issues in total) coordinated by Prof. Dr Antonio Werner (ICOH honorary member) for members, partners and other interested parties. Due to various circumstances, the publication was discontinued in 2012, which left a gap in the Society's offerings to its members and partner organisations. During the conference, as a product of continuous improvement, and following the path of technological innovation, SMTBA was proud to officially launch the first issue of the journal in digital format; it can now be accessed via the SMTBA website: <https://smtba.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Revista-SMTBA-001-Nov.pdf>. Fittingly, this first digital issue (November 2020) was dedicated to COVID-19 and its impact on work and medicine.

The following pre-conference events were held on 2 December:

- Workshop on applied biomechanics for the assessment of injuries
- Workshop on spirometry and respiratory function tests in industry, organised by Dr Jorge Morales Camino (president of the ICOH2012 Congress in Cancun, Mexico)
- Symposium on absenteeism

The opening ceremony of the conference took place on the evening of 2 December. Official welcome messages were delivered by Dr Plinio Calvento (president elect of SMTBA and president of the conference), Dr Viviana Gómez-Sánchez (president of ALSO), Dr Nicolás Santoro (immediate past president of SMTBA), Ms María Cristina Etala (advisor to the under-secretary of Labour of the City of Buenos Aires), Dr Claudia de Hoyos (current ICOH national secretary for Argentina), and Dr María Cristina Pantano (past ICOH national secretary for Argentina). During the ceremony, an award was bestowed on Dr Nicolás Santoro, in recognition of his trajectory in the SMTBA as president from 2017 to 2020 and his contributions in the areas of occupational health and safety management, and preventive medicine, in Argentina.

Dr Viviana Gómez-Sánchez (Costa Rica), president of ALSO, was invited by the organisers to deliver the virtual keynote address at the opening ceremony. Her presentation, titled 'The role of the occupational physician in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic', included the following elements: the meaning of occupational medicine, work safety, occupational wellbeing, basic indicators and health trends in America in 2019; the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Plan of Action on Workers' Health 2015–2025; the role of professional associations and the objectives of ALSO during the COVID-19 pandemic; and final thoughts for occupational medicine professionals in the time of COVID-19.

The following sessions were presented on Day 1 of the conference, 3 December:

- Symposium – Occupational cancer
- Forum – The 'new normal'

- Special session – COVID-19 and the 'new normal' in Latin America
- Update session – Technological innovation in health
- Update session – 'Digital health'
- Roundtable – Leading companies: management in the 'new normal'
- Symposium – Gender and COVID-19

The following offerings were delivered on Day 2 of the conference, 4 December:

- Expert panel – Alcohol and drug prevention programmes: results and opportunities
- Special session – Research presentations by post-graduate students registered for the occupational medicine specialty (SMTBA-UCA [Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina]), organised by Prof. Dr Claudio Taboadela (past ICOH Board member). This session included presentations of a very high academic standard in the following topics:
 - o Coronavirus and occupational health risk assessment
 - o Exposure to ionising radiation due to the use of fluoroscopy in surgery
 - o Chloracne: a disease of the past?
 - o Use of the p53 genetic test in the pre-employment medical examination
 - o Cosmic radiation exposure in flight crews
 - o Toluene: implications of use on the health of restorers of easel paintings and polychromes



'Coordinator of note' – Dr Santiago Aldaz (Argentina) strikes a pose at one of the conference sessions that he facilitated



'Busy body' – Prof. Dr Claudio Taboadela (Argentina) organised and chaired various sessions at the conference, including the special session of research presentations by post-graduate students registered for the occupational medicine specialty (SMTBA-UCA)

- Symposium – Technological breakthroughs in the workplace
- Roundtable – The COVID-19 pandemic and mental health
- Working groups, followed by presentation of conclusions:
 - o Professional certification and re-certification
 - o Medical fees
 - o New occupational diseases that are not listed
 - o Systematic team work in occupational health
 - o Application of computerisation and communication technologies to daily work tasks
- Symposium – Health, safety and environment: roles and challenges
- Forum – Update on health examinations in the ‘new normal’

Ms Claudina Nogueira, ILO vice president for Scientific Committees and SASOM ExCo member, was invited by the organisers to deliver the closing address, titled ‘Challenges and opportunities of occupational health in the ‘new normal’’. Her virtual presentation, preceded by a video recording with an introductory message in Spanish, included an overview of occupational infectious diseases, a discussion on how occupational health has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, lessons learned from COVID-19 that will impact occupational health, and some proposals for the future of occupational health, post-pandemic. Her presentation was coordinated by Dr Santiago Aldaz and translated into Spanish by Prof. Dr Claudio Taboadela.

In closing, the ‘new normal’ ways of living and working that are direct results of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic have shown us, throughout most of the past year, that never has it been more important to collaborate and share learnings. This Buenos Aires conference, *24 Jornadas de Salud Ocupacional*, was an excellent example of a united front in collaboration and sharing of lessons learned, knowledge and experience. Congratulations and heartfelt thanks are extended to all the organisers, presenters and, especially, participants for making it all possible. In addition, this conference brought together a number of developing nations, including Argentina and South Africa, to debate common concerns that we all face in public and occupational health, as well as various country scenarios, particularly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. There is added value in sharing experiences and lessons learned, and this advantage transcends borders and the fact that different languages are spoken in the participating countries.



‘Across the miles’ – Ms Claudina Nogueira (South Africa) delivered the conference closing address virtually, titled ‘Challenges and opportunities of occupational health in the ‘new normal’’

CONGRATULATIONS AND CELEBRATIONS

The SASOM chair and members extend their hearty congratulations to long-time SASOM member and friend, Dr Spo Kgalamono, on her concurrent appointments from 1 January 2021, viz. executive director of the South African National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) and chair of occupational health at the Wits School of Public Health. SASOM looks forward to continued fruitful collaborations with both the NIOH and the Wits School of Public Health, under Dr Kgalamono’s leadership. Well deserved, Spo – we wish you every success for these paramount roles in promoting and developing occupational health in South and southern Africa!

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