

# SASOM steps up support to members in the era of COVID-19

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The South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) national office in Pretoria has relocated to new premises in Montana, after being based in Meyerspark for many years. The new contact details are as follows:

- **Physical address:** Plot 59, Dr van der Merwe Avenue, Montana, Pretoria (*new*)
- **Postal address:** PO Box 32, Silverton, 0127 (*unchanged*)
- **Telephone number:** +27 (0) 87 288 0893 (*new*)

Since July, SASOM has been offering its members webinars dedicated to various aspects of COVID-19, aligned with the topics of interest that have been requested by its members. This online programme

came about because SASOM's annual congress for 2020 was cancelled due to the global pandemic. The webinars are accredited by the South African Medical Association (SAMA) for Continuing Professional Development (CPD points/CEUnits) for all participants, and the presentations are available on the SASOM website, for members to access.

COVID-19-related guidance documents and scientific publications from various sources, including SASOM and the national Departments of Health, and Employment and Labour, have been shared with members. Examples of topics covered to date are (i) Clinical manifestations, risk factors, and maternal and perinatal outcomes of coronavirus disease 2019 in pregnancy: Living systematic review and meta-analysis;



**Reminiscing on the 'good old days' of real-time-real-place meetings that created opportunities for face-to-face professional and social networking – SASOM-MEDICHEM Joint Congress 2019, Johannesburg, South Africa**

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(ii) Occupational medical examinations during the COVID-19 pandemic; (iii) Survey on mental health in healthcare workers during COVID-19; (iv) Co-morbidity factors associated with COVID-19 death in a global study of 17 million patients; (v) COVID directive on compensation for workplace-acquired COVID-19; and (vi) SAMA guide to doctors for issuing medical certificates and letters for COVID-19-related employer and employee requests.

For the benefit of its members, SASOM continues to share information and invitations for online events related to COVID-19, organised by both national and international organisations.

The National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) has established a COVID-19 Task Team whose members organise and present an ongoing training programme, consisting of a series of webinars on a diversity of pandemic-related topics; all events are accredited for CPD points and the presentations are available on the NIOH website. As of mid-September 2020, the NIOH has presented 48 webinars (organised solely or in partnership with other organisations) to close to 31 000 participants – a phenomenal amount of work and reach that deserves congratulations. At a recent NIOH webinar (10 September 2020), titled 'Ethical considerations of health and safety personnel in the workplace around COVID-19', two SASOM members were invited to present, viz. Dr Frank Fox who presented 'COVID-19-related ethical issues specific to occupational health practice: Practical implications', and Dr Murray Coombs who presented 'An

overview of ethics in occupational health practice and outbreaks'. Following this well-attended webinar, the NIOH has uploaded ethics guidance documents on its website for all interested parties. Among these documents is 'SASOM Guideline 17 – Ethical and professional conduct for occupational medical practitioners'. Although the suite of SASOM guidelines is available freely to only SASOM members as a society benefit, SASOM has taken the decision to make the ethics guideline publically available at this time, free of charge, for inclusion in the NIOH compilation of ethics guidance materials that include ethics guidance from various organisations, viz. the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH), the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH), the South African Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (Saioh), SAMA, and SASOM (<https://sasom.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/17-Guideline-on-Ethics-in-occupational-health-2016.pdf>).

To date, seven webinars have been organised and offered by SASOM (Table 1). SAIOH, a sister organisation of SASOM, has also presented a series of online events related to COVID-19, as has Saioh. At a recent SAIOH webinar (4 September 2020) titled 'The use of ventilation to control the spread of COVID-19', SASOM ExCo member, Dr Greg Kew, was invited to co-present and be a panellist with Garth Hunter, SAIOH member and SAIOH representative on the board of the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA).

**Table 1. Webinars organised and offered by SASOM, July to September 2020**

Date	Webinar title	Presenter	Affiliation	No. participants
14 Jul 2020	Standardisation of spirometry: 2020 update	Sr Lindsay Zurba	Director and training manager, Education for Health Africa	87
28 Jul 2020	Cardio-metabolic risk factors for COVID-19 infection	Prof. Veronica Ueckermann	Adjunct Professor, Department of Internal Medicine, University of Pretoria and Steve Biko Academic Hospital	69
11 Aug 2020	Workplace chronic lung complications of COVID-19	Prof. Veronica Ueckermann	Adjunct Professor, Department of Internal Medicine, University of Pretoria and Steve Biko Academic Hospital	94
18 Aug 2020	Part 1 of 3: Statutory legal impact of COVID-19 on practice of occupational medicine practitioners (OMPs)	Dr Jan NR Lapere	SASOM ExCo member, occupational health, safety and medicine consultant, and OHS law consultant	136
20 Aug 2020	Part 2 of 3: Ethical impacts of COVID-19 on practice of OMPs	Dr Jan NR Lapere	SASOM ExCo member, occupational health, safety and medicine consultant, and OHS law consultant	116
26 Aug 2020	Part 3 of 3: COVID-19 and 'new normal' legal and ethical constraints, queries and solutions in the practice of occupational medicine	Dr Jan NR Lapere	SASOM ExCo member, occupational health, safety and medicine consultant, and OHS law consultant	98
3 Sep 2020	Mental health and COVID-19: An OMP approach	Ms Tanya van de Water Dr Nick van de Water	Clinical psychologist OMP and SASOM ExCo member	68

Some of the webinars organised and presented by the Wits Health Consortium, the Health and Welfare Sector Educational and Training Authority (HWSETA), the Foundation for Professional Development (FPD), and Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria (Pty) Ltd among others, are:

- Addressing psychosocial challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic
- An update on COVID-19 in South Africa
- COVID-19: Unpacking co-morbidities
- Fitness for duty and workplace adaptation: Short and long-term health of workers, risks related to working hours, workload and fatigue
- COVID-19 and tuberculosis
- Management and prevention of recurring COVID-19 infections at work: Employee leave, disinfection/cleaning and incident investigations
- Keeping workers safe with masks and respirators
- COVID-19 infection control
- Return to work post-COVID-19 illness and lockdown
- The impact of COVID-19 on the body
- COVID-19 online courses for the healthcare and other essential services sectors and the public in South Africa (offered by FPD)
- Virtual workshop to review the current occupational exposure limits (OELs) as listed in Schedule 22.9(A) of the Mine Health and Safety Act

Webinars and other virtual training opportunities offered by regional and international organisations that have been shared with SASOM members include:

- *Occupational Health Southern Africa* journal – CPD-accredited 'Online scientific writing workshop 2020' – a programme designed specifically for members of the four occupational health societies who would like to improve their scientific writing skills
- World Health Organization (WHO) – Health worker focus: Free online course titled 'Occupational health and safety for health workers in the context of COVID-19' and webinar in preparation for World Patient Safety Day (WPSD) 2020
- American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) in collaboration with the International Occupational Medicine Society Collaborative (IOMSC) – 'IOMSC Global Insights Webinar: Addressing how healthcare worker safety impacts patient safety during the pandemic era'
- ACOEM – 'Incorporating occupational data into infectious disease case reports and employee health records'
- IOMSC – 'Mental and emotional health in the healthcare workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic era: A global perspective', and 'Fresh air and sunshine: Indoors! – Expert guidance and key steps on how clean indoor air can help contain the spread of COVID-19'
- IOMSC and Western Australian Regional Committee of the Australian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine – 'Supporting the State in the recovery phase: Coping with COVID-19'
- The 'Global action on TB initiative/TB Civil Society Group' coordinated by ICOH (managed by Dr Marilyn Fingerhut, USA, past ICOH vice president) shares resources, webinar invitations, funding opportunities and world health 'hot topic' updates on a regular basis. Recent examples are: (i) 'Virtual launch – The impact of COVID-19 on the TB epidemic: A community perspective' (results of a global civil society-led survey); (ii) 'Treatment Action Group (TAG) policy brief: TB research investments provide returns in combating both TB and COVID-19'; (iii) 'Demanding a higher standard of TB care: New tools, new challenges, new approaches to improving TB diagnosis and treatment'; (iv) 'Providing prevention, care, and treatment for TB in low-resource non-US settings during the COVID-19 pandemic' (a CDC-US resource); (v) link to *WHO Bulletin*, a monthly peer-reviewed journal of public health that is fully open-access with no article-processing charges; (vi) a review of the third edition of 'WHO/UNICEF WASH and waste management guidance for SARS-CoV-2'; (vii) invitation to a high-level seminar on 15 October 2020 – 'Fighting the unrecognised pandemic: Re-prioritising TB, HIV and non-communicable diseases in the era of COVID-19' (organised by the Masoyise Health Programme of Minerals Council South Africa); and (viii) link to the bi-monthly TB E-Newsletter (a Global Health Strategies resource)