



From the Editor . . .



**Gill Nelson,
Editor-in-chief**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives: personally, socially, psychologically, economically and academically. Some of us find ourselves living away from home because we were not able to return from where we were on 27 March when the lockdown in South Africa was implemented. We are living in strange times and I wonder what our grandchildren will be reading in the history books. Confusion reigns as 'facts' shared one day are touted as being false the next. Papers are published, without peer review, in reputable journals, only to be retracted a few weeks later – the proverbial closing of the stable door after the horse has bolted. The advice about masks has changed over the past three months. At first, wearing masks was discouraged as they 'had not been proven to be effective in preventing infection', then we were advised to wear cloth masks to prevent spreading the virus. The same pharmacy chain that displayed signs in April, stating that the World Health Organization (WHO) had recommended not using masks unless you were sick, now won't let you through the door without a mask. President Donald Trump sidelined the WHO, implying that the organisation is not to be trusted (not because of its stance on masks). We regularly quote reports and figures from the WHO in our research and in papers published in this journal. It is not surprising that we find ourselves overwhelmed and bewildered as we struggle to make some sense of this 'new world'.

Occupational Health Southern Africa has not been spared. As you know, we fast-tracked our move to an online platform in April, partly because printers, as non-essential services, were prevented from operating. We hope that you have had a chance to download the PDF of the special Mar/Apr history bumper issue from the website (www.occhealth.co.za). If you have read the histories of all the societies, you will appreciate the commitment that they have to improving the health of workers across all industry sectors. All of the societies started 'small', as did *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, and grew into the commendable organisations they are today because of the members' dedication to the same cause.

We have also updated the website, and will continue to do so during the remaining months of this year. Please visit the website regularly and give us your feedback on the changes we have implemented. Please note that, although the previous issue is available to everyone who accesses the website, we will be implementing password control for future issues. In the past, a hard copy of the CEU questionnaire was added as an insert in the journal, and published on the SASOM website. In future, the questionnaires will be available only on the SASOM website from where they can be accessed by members for downloading and completion. The procedure for

the submission of questionnaires to SASOM for processing remains unchanged. I encourage SASOM members to complete the questionnaires as they are a good way to earn points needed to maintain registration with the HPCSA, as per the Continuing Professional Development Guidelines (<https://www.hpcsablogs.co.za/continuing-professional-development-cpd-guidelines/>), as well as to engage with less familiar occupational health topics. The emphasis is on continuing development, after all. Currently, the response rate from SASOM members is disappointingly low.

All conferences planned this year – internationally and locally – have been cancelled, postponed or changed to virtual conferences. For updates, please check the events page on our website. Information will be updated as it becomes available.

In this issue, we have papers from researchers from the University of the Free State (fear of HIV amongst healthcare workers), the University of Johannesburg (physical fitness of emergency care providers), and the University of the Witwatersrand (the use of low-cost devices to refine and improve exposure and risk assessment measurements). All are important occupational health topics and applicable, in one way or another, in this COVID-19 era.

As we prepare to return to work, and as many of you prepare policies for workers returning to the workplace, please note that, on 4 June 2020, the Department of Employment and Labour released its updated Consolidated COVID-19 Direction on Health and Safety in the Workplace, in terms of Regulation 4(10) of the National Disaster Regulations. The notice can be found at https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202006/43400rg11128gon639.pdf. Many important links are provided in the Direction, including those on the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) zero-rated website, www.nioh.ac.za. In addition, the notice on compensation for occupationally acquired coronavirus disease (COVID-19), under the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA), can be downloaded from <https://www.gov.za/documents/compensation-occupational-injuries-and-diseases-act-compensation-occupationally-acquired-0>.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we should not forget the other pandemics that we face in southern Africa and beyond, including HIV, tuberculosis and tropical diseases. On 17 June, the WHO (virtually) launched its road map for neglected tropical diseases (2021–2030). Please see <https://www.who.int/neglected-diseases/Ending-the-neglect-to-attain-the-SDGs--NTD-Roadmap.pdf?ua=1> for more information.

To echo the advice given by many universities and businesses, please work from home if you can; protect yourself, your loved ones, your colleagues, and strangers from the infection by wearing a mask and following good hygiene practices. To quote the Persian adage, "this too shall pass".