



# From the Editor . . .



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

had a profound effect on research. Suddenly, we could no longer brainstorm ideas face to face, and were limited to e-mail exchanges and video meetings that come with many frustrations. Students and independent researchers alike, were affected. Those who were in the process of collecting data, or had planned to start doing so this year, were ethically and physically not able to progress – study sites were shut down, study participants were off limits, and data collection was postponed indefinitely.

Many students had to change their research topics and find datasets to analyse instead. But this 'solution' has several drawbacks, including the difficulty of identifying appropriate datasets. Fortunately, during the last decade, researchers have been encouraged (and sometimes instructed) to share their data – to make it available for others to validate their original analyses and, as importantly, to allow others to analyse the data to answer new research questions.

Data sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed healthcare workers, policymakers and entire governments to make evidence-based decisions. Despite many papers being published without peer review (see, for example, <https://www.medrxiv.org/>) and then subsequently retracted (<https://retractionwatch.com/retracted-coronavirus-covid-19-papers>), we would not know as much as we do if data had not been shared. Without district-, country-, and regional-specific data, we would not know that South Africa currently has the 5th highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the world. Treatments for COVID-19 have been postulated and then disclaimed, and some suggested controls to mitigate the spread of the virus have been implemented, while others have been refuted. Data continue to be generated and shared, and our knowledge and understanding of the virus increase daily.

Data sharing is an integral aspect of research integrity. The fifth responsibility in the 2010 Singapore Statement on Research Integrity, under *research findings*, is that "researchers should share data and findings openly and promptly, as soon as they have had an opportunity to establish priority and ownership claims".<sup>1</sup> Many journals have data sharing policies. Plos One has insisted that authors share their data, since 2014.<sup>2</sup> Other journals that require data sharing are *Science*, *Nature*, and *BioMed Central*. Some funding organisations also require

As I write this editorial for the third of our online issues, President Cyril Ramaphosa has just announced that we will be moving to level 2 lockdown. I echo the caution given by health experts to continue to be vigilant about keeping ourselves and others safe, in anticipation of a second wave of COVID-19.

The lockdown resulted in us working from home and missing out on socialising with friends, and visiting our families. It also

data sharing. Since 2003, the USA's National Institutes of Health (NIH) has stipulated that applicants for large grants include their data sharing plans for timely release for use by other researchers.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of data sharing is accompanied by the premise that data will be stored in a secure and accessible format. But how much thought do we really give to data storage? We have moved from storing data using punch cards in the 1800s to the mid-1900s, to magnetic tapes and magnetic disk storage in the latter part of the 1900s.<sup>4</sup> Some of you might remember the 8 inch, 5¼ inch and, later, the more rigid 3½ inch 'floppy disks' of the 1980s and 1990s. Then we moved to CDs and DVDs and, in 2000, we started using flash drives or USB drives. Now, thanks to the Internet, we can store our data in the Cloud. Everyone knows about security risks to data, and the (high) possibilities of laptop theft, crashed hard drives, and misplaced flash drives. So we (hopefully) back up our data regularly and frequently until the final thesis is written or the paper is published.

In addition to data security, accessibility is important – beyond the published paper. How would you access data that were collected using punch cards in the 1940s? Does your laptop or PC have a disk drive to open a dataset stored on a floppy disk or CD? For data sharing to be possible, it is essential to transfer data to new storage media and readable formats as they become available. In addition, data that can be extracted from a dataset by only one person, using complex programming language, are also not truly accessible. We have long moved away from the lone researcher to more collaborative research teams, where people with varied skills play equally important roles. Just as all authors of a paper are responsible for research submitted to a journal for publication, so too are all members of the research team responsible for ensuring that the data are securely and appropriately stored, and accessible for sharing in the future.

We have research papers and opinions emanating from far and wide in this issue. Under the current circumstances, it would be negligent of us to not report something about COVID-19, and Ayesha Karodia and her diverse group of colleagues discuss an aspect that has received little attention in South Africa – that of the risk of transmitting SARS-CoV-2 in abattoirs. But while the world has, literally, been taken over by the virus, we have not forgotten other important occupational health issues. Botembetume Maboso and his colleagues in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa have written about silicosis in ex-mineworkers – a group for which little information on occupational lung diseases is available. An opinion piece about medical surveillance, from Robin George, is particularly relevant in this respect. In addition, Kobus Fourie and Prof. Hein Brand present their findings from a study on workers' stress. Stress has become an added feature of our lives under COVID-19, especially among healthcare workers.

August is Women's Month in South Africa, and Elize Soer's article (published online by Gender Justice on 3 July 2020) provides a segue from the health effects of SARS-CoV-2 to the economic

consequences of the South African government's lockdown on women who work in informal sectors, such as waste picking and the sex industry. She also talks about the suffering of marginalised and vulnerable groups, including migrant workers and children.

On a positive note, please join me in celebrating nine remarkable women from the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) who are relentlessly leading COVID-19 online training. You might have read about them in various newsfeeds but we honour them here as well, as our friends and colleagues.

I look forward to a world in which we can again attend conferences, meet up with our colleagues, and network with new ones in interesting locations, even if just across the provincial borders. Until then, take precautions to protect yourselves, and stay safe.



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## REFERENCES

1. Singapore Statement on Research Integrity. World Conferences on Research Integrity; 2010. Available from <https://wcrif.org/guidance/singapore-statement> (accessed 19 Aug 2020).
  2. Federer LM, Belter CW, Joubert DJ, Livinski A, Lu Y-L, Snyders LN, et al. Data sharing in PLOS ONE: an analysis of data availability statements. PLOS ONE. 2018; 13(5):e0194768. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0194768> (accessed 19 Aug 2020).
  3. Final NIH statement on sharing research data. Notice: NOT-OD-03-032. National Institutes of Health; 26 Feb 2003. Available from: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-03-032.html> (accessed 19 Aug 2020).
  4. Foote KD. A brief history of data storage. Datadiversity; 17 Nov 2017. Available from: <https://www.dataversity.net/brief-history-data-storage/#> (accessed 19 Aug 2020).
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The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the planning of OH conferences, congresses, symposiums and workshops in southern Africa and across the world. For current notifications of new dates for these events, go to our 'Events' page on the website: [www.occhealth.co.za/events](http://www.occhealth.co.za/events)

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## Upcoming local events

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30–31 Oct 2020

### **MMPA Congress 2020**

Thaba ya Batswana Hotel, Johannesburg, Gauteng  
OR Microsoft Teams Live Webinar  
[mbalenhleb@mpas.org.za](mailto:mbalenhleb@mpas.org.za)  
[www.mmpa.org.za](http://www.mmpa.org.za)

May 2021 DTBA

### **SASOHN Academic Day 2021**

The Lakes Hotel, Benoni, Gauteng  
[admin@saioh.co.za](mailto:admin@saioh.co.za)  
[www.saioh.co.za](http://www.saioh.co.za)

May 2021 DTBA

### **SASOHN Academic Day 2021**

Protea Hotel, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape  
[admin@saioh.co.za](mailto:admin@saioh.co.za)  
[www.saioh.co.za](http://www.saioh.co.za)

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## Upcoming international events

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Rescheduled to 12–14 Nov 2020

### **ICOH WOPS-CV Joint Conference 2020 Joint Conference of Occupational Medicine and 23rd Asian Congress on Occupational Health**

Seoul, Republic of Korea  
[acoh2020@gmail.com](mailto:acoh2020@gmail.com)  
<http://www.acoh2020.org>

25–26 Nov 2020

### **International Occupational Health – Current situation and future trends**

Helsinki, Finland  
<http://www.icohweb.org/site/other-ohs-events.asp>

Rescheduled to 17–20 Mar 2021

### **iMig2020 – biennial conference of the International Mesothelioma Group**

Brisbane, Australia  
[imig2020-program@icsevents.com](mailto:imig2020-program@icsevents.com)  
[www.iMig2020.org](http://www.iMig2020.org)