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2020 SAIOH
president

SAIOH president's message

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SAIOH: SERVING OUR MEMBERS

- We continue to bring information to our membership database via e-mail, on topical issues, technical developments, jobs and more.
- We facilitate and collaborate with other organisations to bring training, information sessions, workshops, and case studies – webinars in this time of social distancing.
- We innovate, explore and implement novel ways of conducting certification assessments in these trying times, to ensure the growth of the Institute and continued development of our members.

As I write this message, news has come through that we have entered lockdown level 1, and I am sure you join me in rejoicing. Our economy is nearly back to normal and spring has sprung after an exceptionally long, dark winter. What a journey, during which I believe and hope, valuable lessons have been learnt. If there is one thing that I have observed, it is that countries around the globe came to realise that there is no development without health. Having said that, I hope that the occupational health and safety fraternity will take up the challenge and assume their roles and responsibilities to achieve healthy workplaces, and thus contribute to the broader public health spheres.

Importantly, COVID-19 is not the only current workplace hazard. Governments in the United Nations General Assembly committed to ending tuberculosis through implementing primary prevention in high-risk occupations, by reducing silica dust exposure in mining, construction and other dusty workplaces.¹ This specific commitment is perfectly positioned for occupational hygienists, in collaboration with other engineering, environmental, health and safety professionals. We need to understand the importance of collaborations, as there is no difference between workplace and public interventions. The same worker is the same person in the public.

On 24 September 2020, South Africa celebrated Heritage Day – a day when we celebrate the cultural wealth of our nation; a day that was more special this year since the gathering restrictions have been relaxed. Finally, the president of our country has announced the Jerusalem dance challenge. I cannot wait for the SAIOH Council to partake in this! Please share with us your own office Jerusalem dance challenge.

CELEBRATED INTERNATIONAL DAYS AND THEIR LINK TO THE CURRENT GLOBAL CRISIS

In this time of COVID-19, with its impact on our health, and physical and mental wellbeing, we would like to highlight two celebrated International Days: World Suicide Prevention Day (10 September)

and World Patient Safety Day (17 September). We salute our health workers who continue to compassionately fight the pandemic on the frontline. We wish strength and solidarity to all those affected by COVID-19.

World Patient Safety Day

This year, the objective of World Patient Safety Day is to raise global awareness about the importance of health worker safety and the need for a holistic approach to patient safety. *Health worker safety: A priority for patient safety* is the theme for 2020. It emphasises the need for a safe working environment for health workers, as a prerequisite for ensuring patient safety. It has never been truer than during this pandemic. Are we, as employers, occupational hygiene professionals, and health workers, doing enough to ensure a safe working environment?

World Suicide Prevention Day

The theme for 2020 is *Working together to prevent suicide*. Suicide is the result of a convergence of genetic, psychological, social, cultural and other risk factors, sometimes combined with experiences of trauma and loss. The COVID-19 pandemic brings anxiety, social disconnectedness, and suffering (economic and health), which add to the burden already borne by people, and might just be the tipping point for someone. It takes work to prevent suicide, and all of us have a role to play, whether at work or at home. There are a few questions that we need to ask ourselves: am I tuned in to those around me and do I act on behaviour changes; am I staying socially connected with those close to me in this time of social distancing; and do I realise that it is okay to not be okay, and that there are helplines and support services available?

International Days: A workplace perspective

Employers must consider all risks associated with COVID-19. These include the risks presented to health workers and other workers in the

firing line, the physical health and mental wellbeing of employees who have COVID-19, as well as the additional workload, stress and anxiety that COVID-19 places on colleagues who remain at work. Ultimately, these affect an organisation's operations and increase health and safety risks (e.g. from absentmindedness). Showing compassion towards employees and providing support and assistance to all those affected (directly or indirectly), will go a long way in these uncertain times.

SAIOH IN A NUTSHELL: 2020 THUS FAR

The year 2020 will be marked as an unprecedented year across the globe – the year that forced everyone to find new and innovative ways of going about many of their activities. It had profound impacts on people and economies, and has brought pandemics and their controls to the forefront. SAIOH is no different – we have had a busy year thus far!

COVID-19

SAIOH sent a motivation to the Department of Employment and Labour at the start of the pandemic in South Africa and, with their support, was listed as an essential service during level 4 of the COVID-19 lock-down. SAIOH was extremely active during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring dissemination of scientific and accurate COVID-19 matters through marketing, collaboration and participation in webinars with the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), Wits Health Consortium, the South African Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (Saiosh), Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB), the Department of Employment and Labour, the Department of Health, the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA), and the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH). SAIOH is currently collaborating with NIOH on a webinar addressing the efficacy and risks of cloth masks, and masks with or without inlet valves.

Two SAIOH-specific webinars related to COVID-19 were conducted. The first one was by Cas Badenhorst and his team (Deon Swanepoel, Sean Chester and other members of SAIOH) on the work done by the occupational hygiene practitioner (OHP) team that conducted COVID-19 risk assessments (RAs) for the Department of Health. This included developing a template for these RAs and setting related occupational hygiene (OH) standards. These invaluable recommendations were incorporated by the Department of Health into the COVID-19 Health Regulations, and by the Department of Employment and Labour into the COVID-19 Health Directives.

The second webinar was coordinated by Garth Hunter and Sean Chester, both of whom are SAIOH registered occupational hygienists (ROHs) who are involved with SAIOH's Professional Certification Committee (PCC), and Dr Greg Kew (occupational medical specialist). The theme of the webinar was the use of ventilation to control the transmission of SARS-CoV-2. In this, indoor air quality was detailed as a barrier to COVID-19, not only now but also after the pandemic. Unfortunately OHPs do not always give the necessary attention to indoor air quality, e.g. in using and recommending effective ventilation for indoor workplaces. This, together with more focus on RAs, is indeed a key focus point in the future of occupational hygiene.

The SAIOH technical team is diligently developing a technical paper on the aforesaid ventilation requirements. We are, likewise, planning to write a technical paper on hazardous biological agent (HBA) RAs, followed by a position paper. A second technical paper, on the importance of effective RA for OH, which will assist in the prevention of future pandemics and occupational health risks, is

planned. In a similar vein, SAIOH recently released a press statement on its role in, and the importance of, OH during this pandemic, and thereafter, as well as a position paper on the transmission of the COVID-19 virus being much further than 2 m.

SAIOH members in the media

SAIOH organised radio interviews for members: Deon Swanepoel spoke about the transmission paper, and Koos Roets spoke about asbestos and the evidence that he gave at the Zondo Commission for State Capture, regarding the asbestos roof audit fraud in the Free State province. Recordings of these are on the SAIOH website and have been circulated to our members and stakeholders.

SAIOH operational activities

SAIOH recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Occupational Hygiene Approved Inspection Authority (OH AIA) Association, and is currently finalising an MoU with the Ergonomics Society of South Africa (ESSA).

The SAIOH administrative team is engaging with website developers and is waiting for proposals to overhaul the SAIOH website. Watch this space (and the website)!

SAIOH branch activities

All SAIOH branches and discussion groups are maintaining contact with their members by holding virtual meetings. In the last month alone, the Gauteng North, Gauteng South, and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) branches, and the Richards Bay discussion group, met this way. The North West (Potchefstroom), North West (Rustenburg) and Western Cape branches are also organising virtual meetings.

SAIOH is lifting the bar, with international OH specialists presenting at our branch committee virtual meetings, e.g. Adrian Sims (a ventilation consultant from the UK) held a workshop with the KZN branch early in September.

Another innovation from the KZN branch, initiated and coordinated by Lloyd Askham (a SAIOH ROH), is a pilot project on continuous development. He is sending two questions, based on real-life OH case studies, via a SAIOH Mailchimp, to the KZN branch members who are expected to research and answer the questions within one week. The following week, he will send a further two questions with a link to the answers (including a detailed explanation for each of the correct answers). The answers will be published on the SAIOH website. This is an excellent initiative to ensure that participating OHPs can maintain their continuous development. If this project is successful it will be rolled out to all SAIOH members, nationally.

FROM THE PCC

Information on the PCC's activities and assessment statistics are provided below. The PCC continues to impress with its use of digital tools and innovative ways of fulfilling its mandate during the pandemic.

PCC operational activities

The PCC executive committee (Exco) had several monthly virtual catch-up calls during the pandemic, and full PCC Exco meetings in March and July, followed by a full virtual PCC meeting (and a SAIOH induction session before the meeting) on Friday 31 July 2020. The PCC team is meeting biweekly via MS Teams to work on the new oral assessment format. This project aims to ensure that the oral assessments and questions asked are fair, equally weighted, cover all OH fields, meet the same quality criteria, and are scored correctly. At the end of this

Table 1. Final written and oral assessment results (2020 year to date)

Certification Category	Assessed	Result		
		Passed	Failed	Pass rate (%)
OH assistants (W201 Course)	39	30	9	76.9
OH technologists	31	20	11	64.5
Occupational hygienists	6	4	2	66.7
Total	76	54	22	71.1

exercise (anticipated to be late 2020), the team will conduct round-robin training for all the PCC assessors on the new system. The new oral assessment format will be rolled out during 2021.

Assessments – Q1 and Q2

The PCC facilitated electronic written assessments throughout South Africa and in Botswana in quarters one and two, with great success. The written results were good: in Q1, 14 out of 23 candidates (technologist and hygiene candidates) passed; in Q2, 30 out of 39 candidates passed. Assistants sat for the W201 exams across the two quarters. From the start of the pandemic, candidates who passed the written assessment in Q1 took their oral assessments on virtual platforms, facilitated by the PCC assessors country-wide. The PCC Exco thanks both the assessors and the assessed for adapting to, and ensuring, an effortless assessment for all participants, in line with COVID-19 control measures.

Assessments – Q3

Seventy-one certification applications were evaluated in the third quarter's written assessments in September: 35 OH assistants, 18 OH technologists, and 18 occupational hygienists. This is a large number of applications, for which we are ready and also very grateful.

The PCC Exco met with the ICT company that is developing the electronic assessments, to iron out some glitches experienced in the pilot phase last year. This is going well. The ICT service supplier also started the task of loading all the questions into the electronic question database. Automatic generation of papers is now within our reach.

For the next assessment round (Sept 2020), all three categories' written assessments will take place on the electronic platform. The papers have been loaded and tested, and applicants have been advised of the electronic assessment system to be used.

Assessment statistics

Table 1 summarises the final certification assessment results, as at August 2020. We congratulate all our members who passed their assessments and wish them the best in their professional development journey. All the candidates who passed will be certified and registered at the respective levels, as per the rules. We encourage those who did not pass not to give up, and to seek a mentor through SAIOH's mentorship programme to assist them in their development. Lee Doolan, PCC administrative officer, can be contacted in this regard.

HAVE YOUR SAY

The SAIOH Council invites and welcomes your feedback on how this communication is helping you as a SAIOH member, and how we can improve. If you have any suggestions, inputs, or contributions, please e-mail them to our president at president@saioh.co.za.

REFERENCE

1. General Assembly of the United Nations. United Nations high-level meeting on the fight to end tuberculosis; 26 Sep 2018. Available from: <https://www.un.org/pga/73/event/fight-to-end-tuberculosis/> (accessed 18 Sep 2020).