



From the Editor . . .



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

In a November 1992 speech, marking her 40th anniversary on the British throne, Queen Elizabeth II said “1992 is not a year on which I shall look back with undiluted pleasure. . . . it has turned out to be an *annus horribilis*”. She was referring to events that had taken place that year, related primarily to her family. In December 2004, Kofi Annan (United Nations secretary-general, 1997–2006) said “I am relieved that this *annus horribilis* is coming to an end”, apparently alluding to corruption and violence in several countries. Five days later, on 26 December, the Indian Ocean tsunami hit. Likewise, I look forward to the end of 2020, the most widespread *annus horribilis* of all time, which has seen the entire world locked down in varying degrees in an attempt to prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2. I hope we, here in South Africa, will not experience our own 2nd wave tsunami that has seen many countries in the northern hemisphere reinstating strict rules, including lockdowns, to limit the spread of the virus.

All of us have felt the effects of the pandemic, and my heartfelt condolences go to those of you who have lost loved ones and patients to the disease, or who found yourselves isolated alone at home during the level 5 lockdown. Many were retrenched with only a few years to go until retirement, and even some of our younger colleagues

had bleak prospects of finding new jobs when companies closed.

The research community was affected in a different way in that travel to conferences and other meetings in exotic (and some not so exotic) locations was cancelled, operational research was put on hold, and networking went virtual. But we learned that we do not need to be in the office every day to be productive. The virus did not stop us from formulating new research ideas; nor did it stop us from progressing in other areas.

Evidently, many of you continued writing up your research findings and, in this issue, we present some of them. Ntlebi and colleagues from the NIOH conducted a study on waste pickers at landfills, with some interesting results. Informal workers are a neglected but economically important part of our workforce, and it is encouraging to see that research in this area is increasing. Two other neglected occupational groups – waitrons and crime scene investigators – have their own specific health concerns. Wolff and Haffejee (Durban University of Technology) and Steyn and Klopper (University of Pretoria) present their findings on low back pain and stress in these two groups, respectively. It is also encouraging to have received two letters to the editor, which indicates that others do read what you write. The first letter is in direct response to a paper on legislated compensation systems and trusts, published in the Sep/Oct 2020 issue of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, and the second is related as it discusses some of the problems with compensation systems in South Africa.

We held two virtual scientific writing workshops in the last few months – one in September and another in November. Attendees received guidance on writing their manuscripts and, at the same time,



David Rees and Gill Nelson, 30 October 2020 Photograph: Guy Hall

earned 14 CPD points for attending all four days. Four SASOM members, two SAIOH members, one MMPA member and one SASOHN member attended the workshops. The societies will circulate the 2021 workshop dates in due course.

On the topic of CPD points, reviewers of research papers submitted to *Occupational Health Southern Africa* can now claim three CPD points per paper reviewed, for their efforts. If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for the journal, please send me an e-mail directly, at gill.nelson@wits.ac.za.

SASOM is committed to providing its members with the opportunity to earn the 60 CPD points that they require every year. Members can earn an additional 18 CEUs by correctly answering 70% of the 12 questions that are based on the scientific papers and other articles that are published in each journal issue. Unfortunately, very few SASOM members complete the questionnaire. SASOM has sent an online questionnaire to all members to assist them to identify reasons for the poor response to the CEU questionnaire. Please participate in this survey.

The National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) and the Wits School of Public Health (WSPH) held a celebratory farewell event for Professor Emeritus Rees on 30 October, the same day that the September/October issue of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* – comprising a whopping 92 pages – was posted. The event was hosted by the WSPH and all attendees complied with social distancing guidelines and wore masks. Those who could not attend due to the limited number permitted in the venue, or distance (many were from outside South Africa), joined via Zoom – either to watch the proceedings or to convey personal messages to Prof. Rees.

Another thing that SARS-CoV-2 did not stop was the finalisation of the long-awaited revised Department of Employment and

Labour's Asbestos Abatement Regulations (https://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/43920_20-11_EmploymentLabour_Asbestos-Abatement.pdf). A webinar on the Regulations was hosted by the NIOH on 27 November. The NIOH has supplied links to the presentations (see the box below).

ASBESTOS ABATEMENT REGULATIONS 2020

Presentations:

1. Background to the Asbestos Abatement Regulations (Ms Bulelwa Huna): <https://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Asbestos-launch-B.-Huna.pdf>
2. Asbestos Abatement Regulations (Ms Elize Lourens): <https://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EL-Asbestos-Abatement-Regulations-Presentation-27-Nov.pdf>
3. Asbestos Sampling (Mr Gabriel Mizan): https://www.nioh.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/DoEL-Asbestos-Sampling-Nov-2020_Mizan.pdf

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/zYLK0d8sxQY>

Audio Link: <https://soundcloud.com/user-349804591/the-department-of-employment-labours-launch-of-the-asbestos-abatement-regulation>

May 2021 be the year in which a vaccine becomes available in South Africa, and life returns to relative normality. In the meantime, I and the rest of the *Occupational Health Southern Africa* team wish you happy holidays, safe travels (if you must), and special times with friends and family.



Please visit our Events page at <http://www.occhealth.co.za/?/events> for updates on cancelled, rescheduled and new conferences, seminars and other scientific meetings.

Please email gill.nelson@wits.ac.za if you would like to add an event to this page.