The mid-term business meeting of the ICOH Working Group on Occupational Infectious Agents (WGOIA) was held at the ICOH Joint Conference 2013, in São Paulo, Brazil. The Conference showcased the activities of the WGOIA as well as the work of three ICOH Scientific Committees (SCs), viz. Occupational Health for Health Care Workers, Occupational Health and Development, and Occupational Health Nursing. The president of the Conference was Dr Ruddy Facci from Brazil, who is a member of both WGOIA and SC for Health Care Workers (HCWs).

The WGOIA contributed to the scientific programme of the Conference by coordinating and presenting the following sessions:

**INFECTIONS, OCCUPATIONS AND GLOBAL TRAVEL (PLENARY SESSION)**

The keynote address of the WGOIA Plenary Session was given by Prof. Lucille Blumberg from South Africa. Prof. Blumberg is a medical specialist in clinical microbiology with additional qualifications in travel medicine and occupational health. She is head of the Public Health Surveillance and Response Division at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases of the National Health Laboratory Service; medical consultant to the Emerging Pathogen Centre; and member of various national and international expert groups in her fields of expertise (tropical diseases, travel medicine, malaria, rabies and viral haemorrhagic fevers).

Prof. Blumberg’s keynote presentation focused on the increasing number of people working in parts of the world where they can be exposed to a variety of existing, new and emerging pathogens, either because of the nature of their work or because specific infectious agents are prevalent in these geographic areas. The integration of travel and occupational health services is particularly important pre-, during, and post-travel as the travel and living environments become part of the occupational environment. Deployment of personnel to developing countries poses particular risks, such as access to safe water, HIV, and limited access to medical care.

The stimulating, visually striking and highly informative presentation included a number of case studies of occupational infectious agents acquired during travel, and detailed some specific high-risk groups for infectious diseases (e.g. geologists, health care workers), who often have to work in remote areas with exposure to animals and disease vectors, as well as outbreaks of infectious diseases.

**ICOH WGOIA – TASKS AND DELIVERABLES (WORKSHOP)**

This workshop showcased the work that has been conducted by the WGOIA since the beginning of the current triennium, and included presentations by three WGOIA members.

- **Ms Claudina Nogueira** has a Master of Science degree in Medical Biochemistry, and is the Senior Health and Safety Advisor at the Anglo American head office in Johannesburg, South Africa, and a SASOM ExCo member. She is also secretary of the WGOIA and addressed the workshop participants on behalf of Prof. Mary Ross, the Chair of WGOIA, in a presentation titled ICOH WGOIA Tasks and Deliverables: 2012 – 2015. The presentation summarised the activities and outputs of the WGOIA for the current triennium (achieved to date and planned to be finalised by 2015), which fall within four identified focus areas, viz. Health Care Workers, Occupational Travel Medicine, HIV and Tuberculosis, and Priority Groups. The outputs include a referenced evidence-based guidance document on clinical best practices in terms of occupational infectious agents and HCWs, and a fact sheet developed in the format of a traveller’s bookmark – “10 Tips on Infections for Occupational Travellers” – for occupational or travel medicine clinics to provide to occupational travellers. A draft of the traveller’s bookmark was distributed at the conference for comment prior to the issuing of the final product.

- **Prof. Stefano Porru** is a physician from Italy, with a speciality in Occupational Medicine. He is Associate Professor of Occupational Health at the School of Medicine, University of Brescia, and is responsible for clinical activities at the Occupational Health Unit of the University General Hospital ‘Spedali Civili’ in Brescia. He has a wide range of research interests, e.g. occupational cancers, gene-environment interactions, biohazards, health care workers, occupational injuries, health surveillance, and fitness for work.
Prof. Porru’s presentation, titled Infectious Diseases and Health Care Workers, was a very comprehensive summary of a Health Care Worker Guidance Document on the prevention and management of occupational infections for HCWs. The document was prepared by Prof. Porru, and is an output of the WGOIA. The main objectives of the Guidance Document are to cover occupational health practices and to provide recommendations in terms of methodology and the significance of risk assessment, health surveillance, immunisation, and fitness for work.

Prof. Mary Ross from South Africa (Chair of the WGOIA, and a medical doctor with specialities in Occupational Medicine, Public Health and Travel Medicine), in collaboration with Prof. Adriano Dusé, a clinical microbiologist with extensive experience in nosocomial infections, including tuberculosis, is adapting the document for use in developing countries, such as South Africa, which has very high HIV and tuberculosis burdens.

• Dr Laura Flores is a medical doctor from Paraguay, with specialities in Internal Medicine, Occupational Medicine and Industrial Hygiene. She holds the posts of chief of the Internal Medicine Ward at the National University of Asunción, and the Director of the Hygiene Department at the Environmental Health Directorate of the Ministry of Public Health, Paraguay. Dr Flores’ presentation, titled Impact of Respiratory Epidemics on Health Care Workers, summarised the outcomes of a study that reviewed the impact of respiratory epidemics on workers’ health in terms of risk, use of personal protective equipment, and immunisation.

HEALTH SERVICES AND OCCUPATIONAL INFECTIONS IN THE MINING SECTOR (WORKSHOP)

Since the mining sector was selected as one of the Priority Groups to be targeted by the WGOIA, the burden of infectious diseases in mining was the topic of this workshop. The presentations were as follows:

• Prof. Mary Ross is the Chair of the WGOIA, Honorary Professor at the School of Public Heath at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, Group Medical Consultant of the De Beers mining company, and a SASOM ExCo member. Prof. Ross’ presentation, titled Occupational Infectious Agents and Mining, was delivered by co-author Ms Claudina Nogueira, as Prof. Ross was unable to attend the conference. The presentation gave an historical account of the association between mining and infectious agents since the 16th century, with a particular focus on tuberculosis and other respiratory infections, HIV, viral and fungal skin infections, and tropical infectious diseases, such as malaria.

• Dr Tatiana da Silva has a medical degree and a postgraduate qualification in Occupational Medicine. She holds the post of Corporate Coordinator of Occupational Health for the Anglo American Niobium and Phosphate Business Unit in Brazil. Dr da Silva’s presentation, titled Good Occupational Health Practices for Combating Infections in the Mining Sector, was delivered by Dr Frank Fox (Global Manager of Occupational Health, Anglo American) as Dr da Silva was unable to attend the conference. The presentation provided a comprehensive overview of the elements of the occupational health programme of the Niobium and Phosphate Business Unit, which include immunisation, hearing conservation, respiratory protection, vector control, and chemical exposure monitoring. The presentation had a special focus on occupational infections.

• Dr João Massahud is a physician and an Occupational Medicine specialist, with a postgraduate qualification in Environmental Management. He holds the post of Corporate Coordinator of Occupational Health for the Anglo American Iron Ore Business Unit in Brazil. Dr Massahud’s presentation was titled STDs and AIDS in the implantation of the mine of the Minas-Rio Project: a preventative approach, and covered aspects related to the establishment of a new mine, in terms of the health of employees, contractors and surrounding communities. Anglo American has established a partnership with local authorities and NGOs to implement a project aimed at building and sustaining a culture of prevention, with the ultimate objective of decreasing the vulnerability of workers and local populations to STDs / HIV / AIDS and unwanted pregnancies, by means of education, community empowerment and health service improvement.

• Dr Frank Fox is a medical doctor with a speciality in Occupational Medicine. He is based in Johannesburg, South Africa, and holds the post of Global Manager of Occupational Health for Anglo American, a global mining company with its main operations in Brazil, Chile, South Africa and Australia. Dr Fox is also the National Secretary of SASOM. His presentation, titled The Challenges of Occupational Health in a Global Multinational: with a Focus on Infectious Disease, provided a comprehensive “A to Z” account of the challenges of providing occupational health services of a consistently high standard across a global multi-national company (given that there are numerous factors that determine the scope and quality of occupational health services that can be provided in each country), and discussed some of the infectious diseases that are encountered.

• Dr Marta Cabrera is a medical doctor with specialities in Occupational and Environmental Medicine, and a Master of Science degree in Community Medicine. She works from Santiago, Chile, as senior partner and Occupational Health consultant to various extractive and mining industries (including Anglo American), at FomentaSalud. Dr Cabrera’s presentation, titled Chilean Miners’ morbidity and high altitude, gave an account of a study carried out at two large copper mining sites in Chile, located at different altitudes, to evaluate the leading causes of consultation to the occupational health clinics at each of the mining sites. The data were analysed to evaluate the role that high altitude can play in terms of workforce morbidity, and to establish the extent of occupational infectious diseases, if any.

Report by Claudina Nogueira, on behalf of ICOH WGOIA

e-mail: claudina.nogueira@angloamerican.com