The MMPA’s 16th Congress was held over two days at the Riviera on Vaal Hotel in Vereeniging, at the end of August. The Association was pleased to welcome 67 delegates who took part in a full programme of presentations from occupational health industry practitioners.

“The 16th Annual Congress was a great success, both in terms of attendance and the quality of the presentations,” said MMPA President, Dr Vusumuzi Nhlapho. “There was robust interaction between the presenters and delegates throughout the Congress as a number of critical issues, ranging from Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL) to the health perspectives of the recent events in Marikana, were addressed.”

The Congress commenced with a presentation on an historical recollection of Mine Social Services in 1949 by Ivan Wermuth from the School of Mines at the University of Johannesburg. He looked back on the status of Mine Social Services, five years after its formation in 1944. He argued that Mine Social Services added value to mine managements, through the prevention of development of suffering conditions and leading sufferers back to suitable and gainful employment. Wermuth noted that social, cultural, mental and financial advice was also given, often using the mine panel doctor as the initial confidential advisor. Patients recovering from diseases, such as tuberculosis, and from mental health problems, were followed through their treatments with an end aim of rehabilitation and finding further gainful employment, either on or off the mine, if at all possible.

A number of presentations were dedicated to addressing the problem of tuberculosis in the mining industry with a detailed outline of the management of tuberculosis at local and community levels, as well as interventions at a regional level. Addressing the management and control of tuberculosis at local and community levels, Dr Liesl Page-Shipp, from the Aurum Institute, gave a presentation entitled ‘Controlling TB in the Workplace’ centred around the findings from the Thibela TB study. The study sought to explore what is needed to control tuberculosis in gold mines and how this applies to other workplaces. The aim of the study was to compare the effectiveness of isoniazid preventative therapy (IPT) given on a community-wide basis with the current standard of care on tuberculosis among gold miners in South Africa. The findings showed that the following interventions were imperative:
• Better case finding – including screening family members of tuberculosis-infected patients.
• Reduce treatment delay among sputum-positive cases.
• Maximise ART coverage – encourage HIV testing.
• Better INH preventative therapy.

With regard to regional interventions, Dr Thuthula Balfour-Kaipa gave a detailed outline of the Chamber of Mines’ response to the SADC Declaration on tuberculosis in the mining industry. In addition, Dr Erick Ventura, Chief of Mission at the International Organization of Migration, emphasised the need for a coordinated approach in addressing tuberculosis in the SADC region.

Further presentations were delivered by delegates representing a wide range of organisations, including the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR), the Aveng Group, Anglo American Platinum, Lonmin, and AngloGold Ashanti, among others.

Ms Zeenat Dasoo, Partner at Webber Wentzel Attorneys, gave a thought-provoking keynote address during the Gala Dinner on the “HPCSA recent regulation on the employment of medical practitioners and implications for the mining industry”.

All presentations delivered will be available on the MMPA website: www.mmpa.org.za

“The MMPA is grateful for the sponsorships of Maponya911 Rescue and Aspen. Planning for the 17th Congress will soon be underway and we are hopeful that this will be supported by an even greater number of delegates,” stated Dr Nhlapho. “It is vital to keep abreast of developments within the occupational health field, specifically as it relates to the mining industry, and to gain a better understanding of the dynamics between socioeconomic issues and the workplace, latest changes in clinical practice, and keeping abreast of regulatory changes. By attending the Congress, occupational health professionals are well placed to gain such insight and knowledge,” Dr Nhlapho concluded.

In order to promote interaction between Congresses, a series of academic symposia are scheduled for 2013/14. To end 2013, one will be held on 16 November 2013 at Lonmin, Marikana and the next one will be held on 25 January 2014 in Kimberley, Northern Cape.

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