

# Countdown to the ICOH2024 Congress: all aboard the 'Marrakesh Express'

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The Officers of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) and members of the ICOH Secretariat and the National Organising and Scientific Committees of the upcoming ICOH2024 Congress met face-to-face, onsite in Marrakesh, Morocco, for the last time before the congress, from 6 to 10 January 2024. The four days of meetings were spent finalising the planning of the congress and scheduling the sessions of the scientific programme.

The rich and diverse scientific programme is well aligned with the congress theme, viz. *Enhancing occupational health research and practice: closing the gaps!*, and will bring together world-renowned occupational safety and health (OSH) professionals, industry leaders, policymakers, and researchers in their particular fields of expertise, to share their knowledge and experiences.

One opening keynote, 10 plenary, and 32 semi-plenary presenters have accepted invitations to participate in the congress. A total of 350 scientific content hours will be provided by the aforementioned

presenters and across 150 Special and Free Paper Sessions, as well as 12 e-poster sessions. The Global Policy Forum, titled 'Strategies to improve occupational health and safety policies and implementation in low- and middle-income countries', will be an excellent opportunity for congress participants to learn from several experts, leaders of national and international organisations, and political decision-makers working in the field of OSH.

Accepted abstracts for oral and poster presentations will be published in an online supplement of *Occupational Medicine*, a key international journal in its field and part of the Oxford Academic, Oxford University Press platform, with an impact factor of 5.1 (Source: Journal Citation Reports, Clarivate, 2023).

ICOH and the congress organisers look forward to welcoming many OSH practitioners from around the world in Marrakesh, the 'Ochre City', at the end of April 2024.



The congress 'cutting crew' at the main entrance of the *Palais des Congrès*, in Marrakesh, Morocco

L to R: Fadwa Darid (Morocco), Sara Soltani (Morocco), Pasquale Fruscella (Italy), Prof. Loubna Tahri (Morocco), Valeria Boccuni (Italy), Dr Diana Gagliardi (ICOH Secretary General, Italy), Prof. Abdeljalil El Kholti (ICOH2024 Congress President, Morocco), Prof. Seong-Kyu Kang (ICOH President, Republic of Korea), Claudina Nogueira (ICOH Vice President and Scientific Co-Chair: ICOH2024 Congress, South Africa), Hamid Jaiti (Morocco), and Khadija Ait Ohanni (Morocco)

Inset: Prof. Kamal Wifaq (Scientific Co-Chair: ICOH2024 Congress, Morocco)

Photograph: courtesy of ICOH2024 Congress organisers

## SASOM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023: A REVIEW OF THE YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

The South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) hosted its annual general meeting (AGM) on Friday, 17 November 2023, in association with the 7th International Conference of the History of Occupational and Environmental Health, in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The AGM was held in a hybrid format, at the Coastlands Musgrave Hotel, using the SASOM Zoom platform, with onsite attendance for SASOM members who attended the ICOH conference. The last SASOM ExCo meeting of 2023 was held on Monday, 13 November, in fully virtual mode.

At the AGM, Prof. Daan Kocks (SASOM Chair) read the 2023 annual report prepared by the SASOM 2023 National Secretary, Dr Frank Fox, and highlighted the financially sound report of the Society as well as the following activities and outcomes for 2023:

### SASOM national office

- The SASOM office bearers for 2023 and 2024 are: Prof. Daan Kocks (Chair), Dr André Kotzé (Vice Chair), Dr Frank Fox (Secretary), and Dr Geoffrey Tafaune (Treasurer). As at 31 October 2023, SASOM had 502 paid-up members in good standing, representing an increase of 11% from 2022. This number includes 451 standard members, 23 student members, 10 honorary life members, nine retiree members, and nine corporate (affiliate) memberships. A total of 397 members (79%) renewed their memberships in 2023 and 95 new members (19%) joined the Society. SASOM also counts among its members representatives from other countries, e.g. Botswana, Canada, Eswatini, Kuwait, Namibia, United Kingdom, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.
- SASOM Guidelines are provided free of charge to members in good standing, as a membership benefit. The Guidelines are regularly revised to ensure that they remain relevant for good practice in occupational health/medicine. Six full sets of SASOM Guidelines and five Guidelines on 'Medical Requirements for Fitness to Drive' were sold to non-members from November 2022 to October 2023.
- On behalf of SASOM, Prof. Kocks thanked SASOM EXCO member, Claudina Nogueira, for her facilitation of the publication of SASOM's pages in *Occupational Health Southern Africa* (OHSA), and Prof. Mary Ross and Claudia Frost (SASOM National Office Coordinator) for drafting and facilitating the continuing professional development (CPD) questionnaires, respectively. Members can earn three CPD/CEU points per questionnaire, potentially earning 12 points per annum (since the beginning of 2023, the Journal has published four issues per annum instead of six as in previous years). Despite all the hard work and time that goes into developing the questionnaires, participation from SASOM members is disappointingly low; less than 10% of members submitted answers to the questionnaires during 2023.
- Formal communication with organisations engaged in the enhancement of occupational medicine continued with SASOM ExCo members (co-opted) from the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), the Compensation Commissioner (CC), ICOH, the South African Society of Travel Medicine (SASTM), and the Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA).
- SASOM liaison with other organisations continued at both national and international levels, e.g. the South African Department of Employment and Labour (with SASOM being an active participant in, and contributor to, the Occupational Health Forum); *Occupational Health Southern Africa*; the Council for Health Service Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSASA); the International

Occupational Medicine Society Collaborative (IOMSC); and the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM).

- SASOM's involvement in the Department of Employment and Labour's Technical Committees for Hazardous Biological Agents and Ergonomics Regulations has resumed in 2024.
- SASOM is a member of the newly established Specialist Practice Committee of the South African Medical Association (SAMA), having joined in July 2023. The Committee is tasked to act in the interests of the specialist disciplines in healthcare delivery and to represent the profession in discussions and consultations with funders of healthcare.
- Short-term priorities being addressed by SASOM include the challenges that have been identified as affecting the occupational medical practitioner (OMP) service delivery for occupational health, as they relate to the definitions of the Board of Healthcare Funders (BHF)/ Practice Code Numbering System (PCNS) in terms of tariff billing and other profession transgressions.
- An occupational health interest group was started in Zambia during 2023, with the intention of paving the way for the potential establishment of a SASOM Zambia Chapter. The interest group held seven meetings during 2023, with an average attendance of 15 participants per meeting, most of whom were from the Zambian mining industry.
- The SASOM website ([www.sasom.org](http://www.sasom.org)) remains interactive and is continuously updated. Webscripto continues to act as the web developer, and the SASOM national office as content manager. Summary website statistics for the period 1 November 2022 to 31 October 2023 are as follows:
  - o Number of unique visitors (excluding repeat visits): 7 673 (up from 5 913 in 2021/2022)
  - o Number of unique visitors, including repeat visits: 25 644 (down from 27 455 in 2021/2022)
  - o Top six trending pages in decreasing order: member login, home page, members' information, membership, SASOM Guidelines, and vacancies.

### SASOM and ICOH activities

- The ICOH mid-term meeting for the current triennium (2022–2024) was held in hybrid mode from 15 to 17 May 2023, in Angers, France, hosted by the University of Angers. The event included the following meetings: ICOH Officers, two ICOH Board meetings, and a meeting attended by leadership representatives of the ICOH Scientific Committees (SCs). For the first time, selected ICOH National Secretaries (NSs) were invited to participate (one from each region), including Prof. Kocks, ICOH NS for South Africa (and representative of the African region) and Chair of SASOM, who participated virtually and presented his NS report on the second day of the meeting. Claudina Nogueira, ICOH Vice President for SCs and ExCo member of SASOM, attended and presented in person.
- The 7th International Conference on the History of Occupational and Environmental Health (organised by the ICOH SC on the History of Prevention of Occupational and Environmental Diseases) was held in Durban, South Africa, from 15 to 17 November 2023. SASOM was represented on the organising committee of the conference, and members chaired sessions and delivered oral and poster presentations. The conference abstracts were published in the Journal (Volume 29, Issue 4, 2023).
- SASOM invited members in good standing who have registered to participate in the upcoming ICOH2024 Congress in Marrakesh, Morocco, to submit applications for partial funding to attend the congress, and selected four eligible recipients of the SASOM grant.

### SASOM awards

- The SASOM award for best publication in OHSa for 2022 was bestowed on Leandr e To ia from the Central University of Technology in the Free State, whose profile was published in the Journal (Volume 29, Issue 3, 2023). Her paper, titled ‘Chest radiography: optimising the radiation dose at industrial mines in the Northern Cape province of South Africa’, was published in the first issue of OHSa in 2022.
- The 2023 SASOM Medal of Excellence, which is awarded to candidates for the Fellowship of the College of Public Health Medicine of South Africa – Division of Occupational Medicine – was awarded to Dr Martin M ller who attained his MBChB degree from the University of Stellenbosch in 2003. Martin started his career as a general practitioner, but gradually gravitated towards the preventive aspect of occupational medicine. In 2015, he returned to academia to complete a diploma in Occupational Medicine followed by a master’s degree (MMed) in Occupational Medicine in 2023. Martin is interested in risk-based medical surveillance and is currently consulting in the private sector.



**Dr Martin M ller**  
*Photograph: courtesy of SASOM*

### Webinars and conferences hosted by SASOM

- SASOM held a CPD-accredited virtual annual congress, themed *Occupational Health Practice in 2023: shining a light on the shadows of medicine*, over four months (June to September 2023) to offer its members four congress sessions in webinar format with individual sub-themes, and four presentations in each session. Prof. Kocks, Dr Tafaune, and Ms Nogueira facilitated and

- coordinated the scientific programme, and Mrs Frost provided technical and logistics support. The 17 presenters were both international and local; seven hold leadership posts in ICOH. The congress was well attended (391 delegates across the four sessions, including presenters) and represented countries from across the globe. The webinar recordings are available in the ‘Members only’ area on the SASOM website and show how SASOM is extending its range and sphere of influence in occupational health at national, regional, and global levels. From 2024 onwards, SASOM plans to hold its Annual Congress and other scientific events in a hybrid format.
- The Public Health Association of South Africa’s (PHASA’s) Occupational and Environmental Health (OEH) Special Interest Group (SIG), in partnership with SASOM, hosted a hybrid workshop titled ‘Bridging the gap between academia and the workplace: re-imagining occupational health training – Preparedness of the occupational medicine provider to enter the working world’. The workshop was facilitated by Dr Blanche Andrews (Stellenbosch University) and formed part of the programme of the annual PHASA conference, which was held at the Boardwalk Convention Centre, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) from 10 to 13 September 2023.
- SASOM and its Northern Cape Chapter, the Asbestos Relief Trust, the Kgalagadi Relief Trust, and Cipla, sponsored and/or co-organised a CPD-accredited hybrid workshop at the Red Sands Country Lodge near Kuruman, on 12 October 2023. Sixty-six delegates participated – 12 in person and 54 online. This was the second hybrid event co-organised by the SASOM national office in 2023.

### Condolences

It is with a heavy heart that SASOM and its members offer deepest condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of Professor Emeritus Tony Davies, a long-time friend of SASOM, promoter and ambassador of the occupational health and medicine disciplines in southern Africa, and a stalwart protector of workers. Ever the inspiration and a guiding light to generations of OSH professionals and occupational medical practitioners, Prof. Davies’ legacy lives on. He will be sorely missed by all of us! 🇿🇦



## Upcoming ICOH2024 Congress

The third and final announcement for the upcoming congress was launched at the end of February 2024. New information includes the list of invited semi-plenary speakers and the topics and organisers of the 75 Special Sessions. The final scientific programme is now available on the ICOH2024 Congress website ([www.icoh2024.ma](http://www.icoh2024.ma))

*Photograph: courtesy of  
ICOH2024 Congress organisers*