

Conducting the Occupational Health Orchestra

SASOHN Eastern Cape welcomed over 200 delegates to Port Elizabeth (PE) – the friendly and windy city – for the 29th annual SASOHN conference. The conductor and fellow musicians trust that the delegates enjoyed their time in PE and found it to be a memorable experience. The theme for the conference was “Conducting the Occupational Health Orchestra”.

The analogy of an “orchestra” can be used to describe the many disciplines that have an influence on the delivery of a comprehensive occupational health service. Every company, clinic and occupational health nursing practitioner (OHNP) has an instrument to play. Each of the instruments can be played in isolation and will on its own produce a fine tune but the beauty or the success of the music is achieved when all play in harmony. The individual activities of these “instruments” needs to be co-ordinated and led by one individual to ensure that all instruments are following the same score. In many cases this conductor is the OHNP as she or he is the only occupational health professional found on site 40 hours a week.

In addition, the musician who does not play is harmful to the orchestra. Our contribution to occupational health, like some participants in an orchestra, may seem insignificant, but when added to the other contributions it can become an essential part of a great masterpiece. The conference focused on sharing presentations on how each musician can contribute to both their own ensemble as well as to the orchestra as a whole.

We must each play our role and fine tune our instruments. SASOHN EC trusts that the delegates have been given some good instruments to use when they conduct their workplace orchestra. This is the way the great symphony of occupational health will make better the workplace and health of the employees.

Each year at the annual SASOHN conference awards are made to those members of the orchestra who have excelled while playing their instrument. Recipients this year were:

OHNP of the year 2009 (individual category) – Karin Bredenhann (West Rand).

Journal article of the year 2009 – Dr Gugu Mchunu (Port Natal).

National Certificate of Merit – Catherine van Niekerk (West Rand).

Regional Certificate of Merit – Ann Davis (West Rand).

Region of the year 2009 – West Rand.

Janet Taylor award for a Diploma in OHN – CM Lombard (Gauteng).

Ian Webster silver medal for Bachelors degree in OH – N Barron (Inland Natal).

This proved to be a conference that embraced all the SASOHN objectives for 2009. More than R20 000 was used to sponsor delegates to attend the conference and improve professional development and speakers and invited guests were drawn from other disciplines in an effort to improve networking opportunities. However, special mention must be made of the efforts made by the region to embrace the concept of corporate social responsibility. All gifts and entertainment were provided by individuals or organisations that would directly benefit the region through investment in the region’s talents and skills.

Maggie Clack, Conductor SASOHN Eastern Cape



Dr Gugu Mchunu (middle) receiving the award for the best journal article by an OHNP published in the OHSA journal for 2009 from Sonja Kruger, SASOHN President (left) and Karen Michell, SASOHN Editorial Board member (right)



SASOHN honorary life members “playing” their instruments at the SASOHN 2009 conference