

Improvement of occupational health services in South Africa

The Department of Labour (DoL) has identified a need for the improvement of occupational health services within the country, with better access to these services. This was a direct result of requests to the DoL, from employers, for a list of occupational health service providers (OHSP) in particular areas of South Africa. Complaints about service quality have also been received from the public, and reported by inspectors. This culminated in the decision, by the DoL, to regulate OHSPs through a registration process.

To ensure the effective provision of occupational health services, an occupational health forum (OHF) was established in June 2015, which meets on a quarterly basis. The focus of the meetings is to address occupational health matters identified by the DoL and relevant role players. The OHF is a collaboration between government and role players in occupational health. It constitutes officials from the DoL, the Compensation Fund, the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN), the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM), and the South African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH).

To regulate the working relationships between the DoL and the different professional bodies within the forum, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were signed with each party. The signing of the MOUs resulted in improved relationships between the DoL, the Compensation Fund, and the professional bodies, which can be demonstrated through

an improved access to Compensation Fund services. The forum has also ensured that all parties to the MOU contribute and partake in the respective workshops and conferences which are held regularly throughout the country. Other matters that have been discussed by the forum include Annexure 3 of the Construction Regulations, compensation of occupational injury and disease, the proposed National Health Insurance, audiometry equipment, and inspections conducted by the Inspectorate at occupational health service providers.

One of the major achievements, to date, of the OHF is the development of a document regarding the approval of occupational health service providers, which was presented at the first OHSP workshop held by the DoL in September 2016. This document detailed the criteria for approval, categories of OHSPs, and approval procedures.

The forum will continue to discuss matters affecting occupational health in South Africa. Individuals who have any occupational health-related queries that they wish to be addressed must please raise them through their respective institutions or societies so that they can be discussed in the Forum.

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