

Commemorating 25 years of publishing research and information for OH practitioners

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Contributions by Chris van Selm (editor, OHSA, 1995–1998); **Mike Baker** (editor, OHSA, 1998–2000); **Fiona Robinson** (editor, OHSA, 2000–2005); and **Linda Grainger** (editor, OHSA, 2006–2012)

THE EARLY YEARS

During 1994, the suggestion of a journal for The South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) was raised, spearheaded by Chris van Selm and Mike Baker. At this time, SASOM was regularly sending a short newsletter to its members. It was important for SASOM to join with the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN) because, in many instances, the nurses were running the occupational health clinics in industry. Doctors, many of whom were not trained in occupational medicine, visited the clinics infrequently. This was also an opportunity to increase the numbers of people to whom the Journal would be distributed, making it more financially viable. It was agreed that primary healthcare (PHC) would be included in the content as this was an important function at company clinics. At that time, the majority of lower-income workers in South Africa did not have access to affordable healthcare services.

Discussions about the Journal took place at a time when new legislation was being promulgated, following the report of the Erasmus Commission of Enquiry on Occupational Health in 1976, which had been appointed due to the high and increasing incidence of occupational diseases. The new and amended Acts and Regulations (e.g. the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act) addressed occupational health and disease more comprehensively. Owners or chief executive officers (CEOs) of companies became responsible for occupational health diseases and injuries on duty, and workers were given the freedom of choice of medical attention and attendants (with the employer carrying the costs).

The objectives of the Journal were defined as follows:

- to provide up-to-date information on occupational health and safety practice in southern Africa, including information on primary healthcare at the worksite, environmental health, and other employee health benefits
- to present current original work and research in the field
- to offer the opportunity for communication between the diverse groups that work in occupational health and safety – not only to health personnel, but also to government departments, academia, employers and trade unions
- to assist in educating all the groups in this discipline, with the objective of protecting the worker
- to provide a forum for discussion and debate on the many issues in this field as well as to identify areas that need to be addressed
- to inform readers about conferences, seminars, courses and related events
- to inform readers of the various occupational health and safety resources and products available by means of advertising and other means
- to promote the discipline of occupational health and to further the aims and objectives of the societies that founded the Journal, namely SASOM and SASOHN

Chris van Selm remembers some teething problems with the publisher and other minor issues, but remarked that he and Mike were very proud when the first draft, with its 'African' border, was submitted.

"Mike and I were active at most of the occupational health and safety conferences, which helped us to find content during this period of political change in South Africa and the field of occupational health."

Chris van Selm, editor 1995–1998

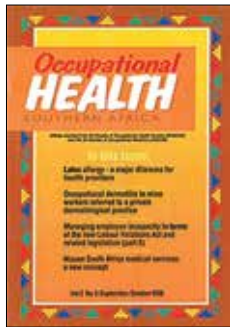
The two societies each generously donated R10 000 and, after burning of the midnight oil for weeks, the first edition of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* (Vol.1 No.1 January/February 1995) was sent to the members of the two founding societies. A few months later, the Leon Commission of Inquiry into Safety and Health in the Mining Industry was released.

'Southern Africa' was used in the title as there were other occupational health services in neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia, and it was important for the Journal to include them. Many of the clinics and services in these countries were aligned with the South African mining industry.

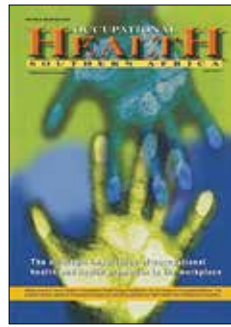
The publishing model of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* offers several advantages. Of greatest value is the way that the Journal has increased the society members' understandings of the different roles of the occupational medicine and hygiene teams, and promoted co-operative practice. Journal subscription, a benefit of society membership, provides society-related news of changes in office bearers, events, and developments such as successes in raising standards of exposure or good-practise resources.

FRONT COVERS

At the start, the front cover of each issue of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* was designed with a different vibrant colour, and a border resembling Ndebele art. "After all, this was an African journal", says Mike Baker. Until 1997, only the list of contents appeared on the front cover. In 1998, photographs, relevant to occupational health, replaced the list of contents but this changed from 1999 to mid-2003, when the majority of covers were dominated by advertisers. The border was removed as a feature of the cover for a couple of issues in 2001. It made a comeback in 2002, slightly altered, after which it did not feature again. Interestingly, for much of the time that Fiona Robinson was editor, the covers comprised occupational health-related drawings by Alain Loretz (mid-2003 to mid-2005), a designer employed by Technique Publishing. In 2006, under the editorship of Linda Grainger, the front cover changed to incorporate both a relevant photo and a list of the papers published in that issue. After discussions about how to make the Journal look 'more scientific' and, following the example of some international medical journals, there was an overhaul of the front and back covers in 2018; the comprehensive list of contents, including page numbers, was moved to the back cover. At the beginning of 2020, *Occupational Health Southern Africa* was again rebranded.



**Vol. 2, No. 1,
Jan/Feb 1996**



**Vol. 9, No. 2
March/April 2003**



**Vol. 15, No. 4
Jul/Aug 2009**



**Vol. 26, No. 3
Jan/Feb 2020**

THE SOCIETIES

While SASOM and SASOHN were the founding societies of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, both the MMPA and SAIOH eventually joined their ranks. Chris remembers the concerns and motivational enthusiasm of trying to incorporate occupational hygiene into the Journal fold, strongly stimulated by health risk assessment courses run by Shell International in The Hague and Shell and BP South African Petroleum Refineries in the UK.

The Occupational Hygiene Association of South Africa (OHASA) joined the Journal in the third quarter of 1998. This was a natural and much-welcomed progression. Consequently, Leon Harmse joined the editorial board and OHASA became an active contributor to the Journal. Subsequently, OHASA and the other South African occupational hygiene body – the Institute of Occupational Hygienists of Southern Africa (IOHSA) – merged to form the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH). Dr David Stanton was the President of SAIOH, which was positive for the Journal as he had links to a number of international organisations and had extensive Internet expertise.

Although SASOM invited the Mine Medical Officers' Association (MMOA) to join *Occupational Health Southern Africa* in 1994, this offer was turned down as the Association was aligned to the Chamber of Mines and the mining houses. Nevertheless, in 2002, the MMOA (now the MMPA) did join, and *Occupational Health Southern Africa* became its Official Journal too.

There was some discussion, at the start, about aligning with the Journals of the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA), but SASOM and MASA had different political views and it was agreed not to add extra layers of administration to the Journal. Thus, *Occupational Health Southern Africa* remained fully independent.

Pooling the members of the four societies created a wide range of expertise from which to draw content and provided a sufficiently large subscriber base to allow the production of a journal.

CONSTITUTION, POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

The constitution – the guiding document for the societies – was written in 2003, and updated in 2007, and again in 2015. In addition, the memorandum of understanding between the Societies and the publisher specifies expectations with regard to publication of the Journal.

The editorial board developed a range of policies, procedures and guidelines to ensure that each issue was of a good standard and that the selection, review and publication of material was transparent and appropriate; Linda Grainger facilitated their development and implementation. As editor at the time, she became a member of the World Association of

Medical editors (WAME). Many of the Journal's policies, procedures and guidelines were based on those of WAME, the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and the International Committee of Medical Journal editors (ICMJE), to promote best practise in our publishing.

Under the watchful eye of Gill Nelson, the current editor, the Journal gradually became more research-oriented, and more aligned with international scientific journals. The layout was changed in that photographs that accompanied scientific papers were removed. The full contents were listed on the back cover – a position that had been saved for prime advertisers in the past. In 2020, full citations were included on the first page of each paper for ease and correctness of referencing. Contributions of authors are now included at the end of each paper. Many of these changes followed the official addition of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) list of 'Journals Following the ICMJE Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals' in 2017.

EDITORS

Initially, the Journal was run by an honorary editor and an editorial board. The first editor was Dr Chris van Selm who occupied this position until the beginning of 1998. In spite of being in a busy general practice, Chris initiated and steered the Journal format.

"Chris deserves to be acknowledged for this sterling effort."
Mike Baker, editor 1998–2000

Mike Baker took over as editor until his resignation at the end of 2000, after which the baton was passed to Dr Fiona Robinson (Table 1). In 2006, Linda Grainger was appointed as the editor, followed by Gill Nelson and Andrew Swanepoel in 2013. Andrew resigned in 2016, and Gill became editor-in-chief in 2018, with Ntombizodwa Ndlovu joining as assistant editor later that year.

Table 1. Editors: Occupational Health Southern Africa, 1995–2020

Name	Years
Chris van Selm	Jan 1995–Feb 1998
Mike Baker	Mar 1998–Dec 2000
Fiona Robinson	Jan 2001–Apr 2005
Linda Grainger	May 2006–Dec 2012
Gill Nelson and Andrew Swanepoel	Jan 2013–Feb 2016
Gill Nelson	Mar 2016–Aug 2016
Gill Nelson and Ntombizodwa Ndlovu	Sep 2016–current

Although most editorials have been written by the editor of the time, many occupational health experts have served as guest editors over the years (Table 2), all of whom continued to make valuable contributions to the Journal.

EDITORIAL BOARD

The editorial board has always comprised only members of the four societies, and the publisher. The first editorial board had equal representation from both founding societies: Dr Chris van Selm and Dr Mike Baker from SASOM, and Sr Brenda Webster and Sr Penny Mead from SASOHN (Table 3). The Constitution of the editorial board requires that two representatives from each society serve as members of the board. Most members have remained on the board for several years, the longest standing being Karen Michell who resigned in 2018 after 17 years.

The editorial board meets at least three times a year, usually in Johannesburg where most of the members are based. The Board provides guidance and oversight by developing policies, processes and standards, planning and eliciting content, suggesting reviewers, and conducting post-publication reviews. Another essential function of the editorial board and the publisher is to consider the Journal’s financial viability, which includes innovative ways to increase advertising.

PUBLISHERS

The Journal was, and still is, based on a sound publishing model and, from the beginning, was produced by independent publishers (Table 4). Kevin Beaumont, the current publisher, has proved to be a backbone of the Journal from when he started in 2003 under the auspices of Technique Publishing, changing to the sole proprietor of MettaMedia in 2017.

Table 2. Guest editors: Occupational Health Southern Africa, 1995–2020

Name	Issue
Brenda Webster	May/June 1998
Murray Coombs	July/Aug 1998
Malcolm Steinberg	Nov/Dec 1998
David Stanton	Sep/Oct 2001
Jenny Serfontein and Claire Deacon	Nov/Dec 2002
Linda Grainger	May/June 2005
Stephanus Snyman	July/Aug 2005
David Stanton	Sep/Oct 2005
Karen Michell	Nov/Dec 2005
David Stanton	Jan/Feb 2006
Mary Ross	Mar/Apr 2006
Delene Bartie	Sep/Oct 2006
Leslie London	Nov/Dec 2006
Jacques Goosen	July/Aug 2007
Karen Michell	Sep/Oct 2007
Hanli de Wet	July/Aug 2008
Sibongiseni Myeni	Sept/Oct 2008
Rajen Naidoo	Nov/Dec 2009
Gail Todd	Sep/Oct 2010
Penny Orton	Nov/Dec 2015
Sophie Kisting	July/Aug 2016

Table 3. Editorial board members: Occupational Health Southern Africa, 1995–2020

Society	Name (years)
SASOM	Chris van Selm (1995–1998)
	Mike Baker (1995–2000)
	Arthur Begley (1999–2005)
	Terry Geddes (1998–1999)
	Fiona Robinson (2001–2005)
	Stuart Shearer (2002–2005)
	Frank Fox (2003–2011)
	Hanli de Wet (2006–2010)
	Daan Kocks (2010–current)
	Spo Kgalamono (2012–current)
SASOHN	Penny Mead (1995–1996)
	Brenda Webster (1995–1999)
	Bev Hoggins (1996–2000)
	Dee Boorman (1999–2000)
	Karen Michell (2001–2018)
	Jenny Edmonds (2001–2006)
	Linda Grainger (2006–2013)
	Melinda Venter (2009–2011)
	Penny Orton (2011–2016)
	Sibongiseni Myeni (2007–2012)
	Margot Pretorius (2007–2008)
	Angela Butkovic (2017–2018)
	Michelle Bester (2018–current)
Babusisiwe Thandi Evan Kumalo (2019)	
Natalie Copeling (2020–current)	
SAIOH	Leon Harmse (1998–2000)
	David Stanton (1999–2008)
	Johan Schoeman (2001–2006)
	Andrew Swanepoel (2012–2016)
	Cas Badenhorst (2011–current)
	Johan du Plessis (2012–current)
MMPA	Ronald Guild (2002–2005)
	James Malemela (2002–2005)
	Elton Dorkin (2004–2012)
	Charles Mbekeni (2012–2015)
	Jill Murray (2007–2013)
	Gill Nelson (2012–current)
	Vusumuzi Nhlapho (2013–current)
	Jim Phillips (2015–2019)
Dipalesa Mokoboto (2020–current)	
Other	Ntombizodwa Ndllovu (2016–current)
	Kevin Beaumont (2003–current)

Table 4. Publishers: Occupational Health Southern Africa, 1995–2020

Name	Years
Delinds Publications	1995–1996
Cannon Medical Media	1996–2000
Safety First	2001–2002
Technique Publishing	2003–2017
MettaMedia	2017–current

ADVERTISING AND FINANCES

The financial aspect of the Journal started off badly. The Compensation Commissioner at the time, Mr Louis van Assen, had agreed that the Compensation Fund would sponsor the Journal but, disappointedly, he reneged a month before publication of the first issue. Mike Baker's wife, Pru, was urgently recruited as the advertising manager to raise the funds. Credit to her, she managed to raise enough money for the first issue and, thereafter, never missed the financial target for any issue. No funds were required from either of the societies.

Pru worked for the societies under Delinds Publications for a year, and then for the medical publishers, Cannon Medical Media, which employed her to do the advertising, and produced the Journal.

"When my wife, Pru, and I started this journey, we really had little idea of what was to come. There were tough times and teething problems and it was hard work, with many late nights and early mornings. But we both look back and feel it was a very gratifying project. From our small beginnings, we were delighted to see the growth, the improved standard of the articles, and the increase in readership, and we felt that it had achieved many of the original objectives."

Mike Baker, editor 1998–2000

Mike Baker initially sourced and requested many of the articles and, depending on what was received, he and Pru would agree on a theme around which Pru focused her advertising campaign. Pru resigned in mid-1999, after which Cannon Medical Media was appointed to find advertisers.

Unfortunately, Cannon Medical Media went into liquidation at the beginning of 2001, and there were no issues of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* published for the first six months of that year. However, Safety First stepped in to fill the void, and business continued at usual.

After Pru Baker resigned, Theresia Hartslielief took over the responsibility of finding advertisers, followed by Jenny Anderson, Hillary Howie, Joan de Buerge, Gary Steyn, Tracy Karam, Leigh Scott, Tania Milic, Anne van Vliet and, currently, Tracy Wolter.

The length of the Journal depended largely on the advertising revenue generated, from the start; it still does. In the early years, issues usually consisted of 32 pages, but in July/August 1997, the issue was a bumper 76 pages, coinciding with the Pan African Conference of Occupational Health in Durban. Most issues over the years have remained at around 36 pages as the Journal remains reliant on advertising to cover production and print costs. Despite the drive for adverts, they have always had to be appropriate, responsible and meet high standards to be included in the Journal.

In addition to advertisers, the Journal has always been supported by society members' subscriptions. Annual society membership fees include a cost to receive six hard-copy issues of the Journal by mail.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE

Sr Brenda Webster, the permanent part-time secretariat for SASOHN, was the first person responsible for management of annual subscriptions for *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, the cost of which was R41.00, including VAT, in 1995. The international subscription rate was R60.00. The people who have assisted with production, printing, subscriptions, layout, design, etc. are too many to list, but special mention must be made of Jenny Gent and her production team, under the able management of Carol Finn. Jenny was totally committed to preparing the Journal for publication and printing for many years. Sadly, she passed away in 2016.

"I cannot say the period of 2000 to 2005, when I was editor of Occupational Health Southern Africa, was always a pleasure. My busy occupational health life was punctuated by e-mails and calls from Jenny Gent, saying, "It's that time again!" What I can say is that it was an honour to have been the editor, and an absolute privilege to work with the likes of Jenny. In my opinion, she kept the Journal alive and was a pivotal figure in its on-going appearance.

An incident which occurred when I was stuck in Nigeria illustrates this so well. I was on contract in Port Harcourt for the week prior to the Journal coming out. My nickname, "Last-minute Robinson", was well known to Jenny and I had, of course, left all the editor-type activities for the Monday, safe in the knowledge that I would be back in South Africa the previous Friday and well rested by then.

A strike by the ground crew of the Airports Company South Africa the week I was in Nigeria halted all traffic to the (then) Johannesburg International Airport (now O.R. Tambo International Airport). I was stuck in Port Harcourt! Those who have had the pleasure of travelling to Nigeria will know that movement within the country and communications out of the country were extremely difficult. I could only imagine the chaos this was causing for Jenny, as she received no replies to her e-mails and calls.

But, true to form, she showed no sign of panic when I eventually returned to Johannesburg on the following Tuesday with only a day to get everything sorted out. She had taken on many of the editorial tasks, and the Journal went to print only a day late! As I reflect, I must say that the amazing input of the authors, advertisers and other contributors, without which we would not have had a journal, could not compete with my memories of my interactions with Jenny. It was with sadness, and a feeling of the end of a brilliant chapter in my life, that I heard of her passing."

Fiona Robinson, editor 2000–2005



ACCREDITATION AND RECOGNITION

In 2004, the Journal was officially accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and, since then, South African universities have received subsidies for research papers written by their staff and students, and published in the Journal. This accreditation attracted submissions of manuscripts to the Journal. Although correspondence to the editors, abstracts, keynote addresses, obituaries, book reviews, news articles and advertorials are not subsidised by the DHET, this content is important for the professional societies and their members. Therefore, to meet the different needs, the editorial board stipulated that every issue should include such content as well as at least three research papers.

In 2011, the editorial board agreed to have the Journal added to the SABINET African Journals online journal platform. All the South African academic institutions subscribe to SABINET, so all our content became available to academics and students. It could be used for academic courses and made the Journal more attractive to authors because it increased the likelihood of their papers being cited. The member societies also successfully encouraged academic institutions offering occupational health courses to use articles published in the Journal. Consequently, research and other papers were included in course materials and were cited in students' research reports.

At the beginning of 2012, the African Index Medicus agreed to include *Occupational Health Southern Africa* in its online database of

"Producing the Journal with content that met the needs of the professional society members and at the same time attracted authors of good-quality articles was one of the most important and challenging aspects of my role as editor. Most of the society members wanted a journal with content that was evidence-based, practical and relevant for implementation to provide occupational health services that were of a high standard and complied with legal standards.

We were particularly fortunate to have Jenny Gent allocated to Occupational Health Southern Africa. She cared deeply about the Journal, really understood how it was published and what we wanted to achieve, and considered it an honour to work with us.

Once Jenny had laid the material out on the pages, I would proofread the issue and help finalise it for publication. This required a very quick turnaround and so, unsurprisingly, meeting deadlines is a key memory! All the team members were proactive, reliable, and dependable, and worked hard to ensure the high quality of each issue of Occupational Health South Africa.

A remarkable part of my experience as editor was the excellent support I received from the publishing company and its production team. Kevin Beaumont was the publisher, and Carol Finn the production manager. Both had immense expertise in all facets of production.

Jenny managed the subscription list and circulation, and I was amazed at how many of the members' names she knew. She was the first point of contact for the Journal, so dealt with enquiries and author queries, and monitored the online submission facility.

During my six-year term, I learned so much about the different disciplines, our professional societies and publishing. As the first editor to be drawn from SASOHN, I found it a stimulating role, and the experience has been put to good use in my subsequent publishing positions.

I have wonderful memories of working with the professional societies, their members and the editorial board members. United in their enthusiasm, commitment and drive to make Occupational Health Southern Africa successful, they gave me great support by offering guidance and innovative ideas for growing the Journal, providing articles, ensuring that the Journal was relevant and met members' needs, and being willing peer reviewers."

Linda Grainger, editor 2006–2012



journals. This meant that the Journal would also be listed in the Global Index Medicus, thus making our open content available worldwide and increasing our exposure.

CONTINUING EDUCATIONAL UNITS

The awarding of continuing educational units (CEUs), or continuing professional development points (CPDs), was introduced at the end of 1999. Answers to multiple-choice questions were submitted by SASOM members, who then received certificates at the end of each year. This practice continues today. Questions were originally developed by Dr Danie Ungerer. Prof. Mary Ross is the current quiz master.

WEBSITE

Cannon Medical Media introduced a system by which all past Journal articles were placed on their website. Unfortunately, this functionality was lost when the relationship with the publisher ended. However, in 2018 Kevin Beaumont (MettaMedia) made a concerted effort to have hard copies of all these early issues scanned and posted online in PDF

format. All past issues and papers are now accessible via the website archive.

In 2007, the editorial board tasked Kevin Beaumont to contract a developer to build a website for the Journal. Testing began in April 2007 and the website was launched in November of that year. The home, subscriptions, guidelines for articles and contact pages were open access, and the remainder were password protected. The upgrade was completed by the end of 2010.

Features of the content management system included news, upcoming events, abstracts and full articles, as well as supplementary materials such as case studies and data files, useful resources, online article submission and tracking, and a search facility. Non-society subscribers were given the option to subscribe to the digital content only (but at a non-preferential cost in relation to that applicable to society members who have full access to both print and online versions). This was to attract subscribers from other African countries who might otherwise view the high international postage costs and unreliable delivery service to be disincentives. Developing the online article submission facility was a lot of work and involved Linda Grainger, the publishing team and the editorial board. It included:

- explaining how to use the facility
- revising the general instructions for authors
- revising or producing guidelines for different types of articles
- developing the article tracking system
- revising or developing the peer-review forms for different types of articles
- developing a communication system
- developing copyright forms and a system for uploading completed ones

Developing the Journal's website was a significant step and enhanced interactivity with societies, subscribers, authors and peer reviewers. Plans are in motion to launch a new website which will include a digital 'flipbook' version of the Journal, as the architecture and functionality of the current website are now outdated.

The manual tracking of manuscripts submitted, and subsequently rejected or accepted for publication, was an arduous undertaking. Administratively, it was almost impossible to maintain once the editorship was handed over, in 2013, to Gill Nelson and Andrew Swanepoel, who both had full-time university positions. Together with the publisher, Kevin Beaumont, an academic manuscript management software and service provider was identified. Scholastica was launched at the end of 2018 and tracking of manuscripts immediately became easier.

In 2019, it became clear that more hands were needed. Gill Nelson (editor-in-chief) and Ntombizodwa Ndlovu (assistant editor) were struggling to keep up with the continuous demands of identifying and following reviewers. Consequently, an editorial advisory panel was constituted. Andre Rose, a public health specialist, was the first appointee; followed by Tom Fuller, occupational hygienist and president-elect of the International Occupational Health Association (IOHA); Jim Phillips occupational health researcher and retired from the NIOH; and Mary Ross, occupational medicine specialist and former executive director of the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH).

THEMES

In past years, the editorial board identified important and useful themes for upcoming issues, as well as possible authors. Themes included work and vision, trauma, noise and noise-induced hearing loss, respiratory health, managing chronic diseases in the occupational health setting, shift work, infections, ethical and human rights, reproductive health,

skin disease, and nanoparticles and nanotechnology – all in relation to occupational health. Over time, the number of submitted manuscripts increased and issues became more general rather than based on particular themes.

ASSISTANCE TO AUTHORS

From the beginning, the editorial board members encouraged those who were keen to publish articles, based on their research and recent developments, in *Occupational Health Southern Africa*. While emerging academics and post-graduate students in occupational health and related fields might prefer to publish in journals with high citation indices or impact factors, many look to *Occupational Health Southern Africa* as a first step in their research publishing careers.

The editors have always helped novice authors – society members and others – to write papers that can be published. After submitted articles have been peer reviewed, the editor sends the feedback to the author and, if the reviewers have judged it suitable for publication, explains what needs to be changed for it to meet the publication standards. Authors often need encouragement to persevere through the (sometimes arduous) process, which can entail feedback over several versions. Although this is very time consuming, it is well worth the effort, and many authors have expressed their gratitude for the assistance.

In 2007, a project was initiated to develop research writing skills. It consisted of a series of workshops, funded by the publisher, in which several interested members were shown how to write up their work for publication. A few papers were subsequently peer reviewed and published. There are plans underway to repeat this exercise later this year.

INITIATIVES TO INCREASE THE JOURNAL'S EXPOSURE

South African researchers need to publish their work in well-known international journals with wide readerships, but this has often meant that their work was not accessible to local readers because the subscriptions are too costly. The Journal offers authors a channel for dissemination of their research locally, as subscriptions remain affordable, especially for members of the four stakeholder societies.

It was also important to make *Occupational Health Southern Africa* truly a journal for southern Africa. However, it was difficult for people in neighbouring countries to participate because Internet access in some regions was (and still is) poor, and the subscription fee is too costly for some individuals and organisations, including academic institutions. Also, professional societies are almost non-existent in neighbouring countries. We had modest successes by promoting the Journal through the professional societies' activities and other initiatives, such as the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) and The Work and Health in Southern Africa (WAHSA) Programme special issues in 2009.

SPECIAL ISSUES

The Journal has also benefitted from initiatives of the individual professional societies, which resulted in the production of several special issues, examples of which are listed below.

SASOM hosted the ICOH congress in March 2009 in Cape Town, having won the bid in 2000. The three other Societies supported SASOM in planning and staging the congress. A special issue of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* contained the keynote presentations for all the ICOH delegates. It was a great honour to be chosen to publish these, and it increased the Journal's exposure because the issue was taken back to numerous countries. Although most of the society members were unable to attend the conference, they were able to read the presentations and abstracts.

"Working on Occupational Health Southern Africa is stressful and, at times frustrating, but the satisfaction of creating each issue is immense. The team is a 'family' dedicated to delivering occupational medicine and hygiene research findings, and related information, news and updates. The experience of being the editor of the Journal has increased my knowledge about occupational health issues in general, and has enriched me in many ways. I thank the production team members in KwaZulu-Natal, especially Carol Finn and Michelle Perry (and the late Jenny Gent) for the sterling job they do; Zodwa Ndlovu, the assistant editor, for so often stepping in before I fall over the edge; and Kevin Beaumont, the publisher, for his constant support, his endless flow of ideas about how to improve the Journal, and for having the patience of a saint.

The Journal is published bimonthly but there is no break from the work that needs to get done in preparation for the next issue. When any of us takes an annual holiday, or a break from our usual jobs in December, Occupational Health Southern Africa comes along for the ride, and is as demanding as a hungry child with an insatiable appetite. It needs our constant attention."

Gill Nelson, editor-in-chief 2013–current



The 50th anniversary of the NIOH was celebrated with a special issue of papers on its work in 2006. A practical guide to noise and vibration control in the South African mining industry, produced by the NIOH with the Mine Health and Safety Council, was included as a compact disk (CD).

The Work and Health in Southern Africa (WAHSA) Programme also involved the four societies. Funded by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, it ran from October 2004 to May 2009 and did much to improve occupational health in the region. The last issue of 2009 featured content on WAHSA.

In 2016, another special issue was published to celebrate the NIOH's 60th anniversary. Dr Sophie Kisting, the executive director of the NIOH at that time, was the guest editor. Findings from recent research by NIOH staff were published, as was an article from Prof. Tony Davies, director of the NIOH from 1983 to 1996 (although he continued working there for another 19 years); and an obituary for Dr Danuta Kielkowski who worked as an epidemiologist at the Institute from 1983 to 2014, and is still sorely missed.

The most recent special issue is the current one which showcases the histories of the four professional societies. The special issue was planned to coincide with ICOH 7th International Conference on the History of Occupational and Environmental Health in May this year, in Durban. Unfortunately, the conference, along with many others, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic – something that will be read about in history books by generations to come. The conference organisers are hoping to hold the conference in 2022.

CONCLUSION

Occupational Health Southern Africa is the only occupational health journal in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The people who are responsible for producing each issue are dedicated to disseminating research findings from local studies, supporting young emerging researchers to publish, and promoting the health of workers from all industries. None of this would be possible without the society members' assistance and contributions to the Journal.