

# SASOHN celebrates 40 years of excellence serving South African OH nursing practitioners

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What qualities are associated with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary? Trust, loyalty, 'brand', quality, dedication, achievement, strength, maturity – and the list goes on. At 40 years, despite challenges and hardship along the way, an important milestone is reached, proving nothing need stand in the way as one keeps reaching to accomplish more, with the right frame of mind.

This year, the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (affectionally known by members as 'SASOHN') turns 40. The anniversary is auspicious as it coincides with the celebrations of the World Health Organization's (WHO's) *Year of the Nurse and Midwife 2020*. Irrespective of their speciality, nurses make up more than 50% of the global healthcare workforce; this year we will be honouring the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing.

SASOHN has stood the test of time for all occupational health nurses in South Africa. The Society continues to make inroads and collaborates with most stakeholders and like-minded individuals who have an impact on their daily work activities. Despite the challenges that occupational health nurses in South Africa face, playing a dual advisory function to both employees and employers, often work independently, have their own mobile units, or are consultants in the occupational health arena. These individuals are brave, determined, vocal go-getters who try to resolve issues that affect them, employees, employers, and the community at large, all while working within the boundaries and scope of professional practice. The multi-disciplinary team approach has also been enhanced with the assistance and inputs of trade unions in clarifying matters, and we continue to embrace the cordial relationship that has been established.

When SASOHN celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005, and its 35<sup>th</sup> in 2015, articles were published in *Occupational Health Southern Africa Journal* (OHSJA), concentrating on the timelines of occupational health nursing (OHN) as a profession. However, this time around, it is necessary to highlight some of the achievements along this fantastic historical journey of SASOHN.



**Mrs Jenny Accutt (lecturer) with SASOHN Pretoria members in first Occupational Health Certificate course**



**Karen Michell, editor of the SASOHN textbook, *A Practical Approach to Occupational Health Nursing*, signs copies at the book launch during the 2011 AGM gala evening**

In April 1980, the newly formed SASOHN established an executive committee which comprised one representative from each region across South Africa. An observer attended at intervals when necessary. The office bearers held the positions of president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. SASOHN's first democratically-elected president was Stella Coetzee. Presidents and the other office bearers are elected by members and can serve up to two terms of office. Members cast their votes for office bearers in September, before the annual general meeting (AGM) in November. Each new president has contributed fresh, innovative ideas, displaying all the qualities a leader should have.

Initiatives to host workshops, seminars and, eventually, conferences have led to members to look eagerly forward to two national highlights per year. The Academic Days and the SASOHN Annual Conference are a means for South African occupational health nurses to get current evidence-based practice tools that can be shared and/or implemented in their workplaces. The opportunities also allow the multidisciplinary occupational health teams to network and present their cases or research via poster displays.

By 1981, the South African Nursing Council (SANC) approved the opening of a school in the (then) northern Transvaal, named Pretoria School for Occupational Health; on 7 October 1982, the SANC recognised occupational health as an additional qualification. As the industry needs evolved and roles expanded, it became necessary to work together with the SANC to compile a competency framework for occupational health nurses, which was established in 2013. Today, occupational health nursing practitioners (OHNPs) are recognised by the SANC in the categories of Advanced Nurse Practitioners when they have achieved a South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level 8 qualification, and as Specialist Nurses when they achieve a Masters in Nursing at NQF level 9 and/or a Doctorate in Nursing at NQF level 10. We salute all the BTech degrees, Masters degrees and PhDs as these qualifications serve to pave the way for the future generation of occupational health nurses.



### SASOHN Pretoria delegates at the 1995 SASOHN Conference in at Eskom Conference Centre

Once again, it is vital to acknowledge that SASOHN has always encouraged its members to do research, write articles and present their research at conferences and other forums. SASOHN guidelines have been written and adopted to provide direction for inspired members.

On 25 November 1983, the first national textbook, *An introduction to Occupational Health Nursing in South Africa*, compiled and edited by M Baker and AC Coetzee, was published by Wits University Press. In 1984, a meeting was held with Prof. Kotze at the University of Port Elizabeth to discuss establishing a diploma course in OHN. At the 2011 AGM in Mpumalanga, SASOHN proudly launched *A Practical Approach to Occupational Health Nursing*, edited by K Michell. This book gave our members better insight into occupational health and remains an invaluable resource for our young, upcoming OHNPs.

In 1987, the first honorary life membership was awarded. This is reserved for members who have achieved beyond the objectives of SASOHN. The criteria are stringent, and one must meet the requirements with a portfolio of evidence that is reviewed by the relevant regional committee before it can be considered by the national office bearers. This prestigious award is handed out at the gala dinner evening at each AGM. Honorary life members are very active within SASOHN and their valuable contributions will help to take the Society forward for another successful 40 years.

In 1991, Jenny Serfontein was elected as the SASOHN president

and presented a paper at the PAN African Congress in Lusaka. In 1993, she was nominated as the first South African nurse to serve on the Scientific Committee of Occupational Health (SCOHN) and continued to become the first OHNP to serve as a board member of the International Commission for Occupational Health (ICOH). She received an Emeritus Award in recognition for her efforts in promoting occupational health nursing at an international level. She was also invited by the (then) Minister of Health to serve on the Committee for the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Since then, SASOHN members have been affiliated with ICOH through any one of its 37 Scientific Committees. Here, they make contributions to evidence-based practice from southern Africa that influence global standards and policies. SASOHN encourages all the regional chairpersons and its membership to be part of the ICOH Scientific Committee for Occupational Health Nursing.

The Academy of Nursing of South Africa (ANSA) was constituted in 2011 with the vision of recognising and utilising excellence in nursing, midwifery and other speciality areas of nursing. The aim is to contribute to the nursing profession by promoting excellence in nursing and healthcare through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of knowledge in specialist areas. The award categories include nursing education, practice (different specialities, including occupational health), management and research. Various members of SASOHN have been deservedly honoured for their contributions in their fields of expertise.

SASOHN soon discovered a need for all its members to have indemnity cover against medical malpractice claims and, in 2001, all paid-up members were awarded professional indemnity. Professional indemnity malpractice insurance is much needed in a field where OHNPs are expected to render occupational health services while also collaborating within a multidisciplinary team. SASOHN members now have peace of mind when they suspect a potential claim will be laid against them. They are covered for malpractice damages, which include their legal defence costs and those of the plaintiff in the event that a costs order is made against them. This remains one of the many benefits that SASOHN paid-up members enjoy as specific to our field of nursing. The indemnity offered by the other nursing associations is predominantly for nursing practice in hospital settings.

On 7 March 2001, SASOHN submitted a proposal to assist the (then) Department of Labour with administering an audiometry database which is still active today. All members with a valid certificate of



**Karen Michell, president (2005)**



**Kim Davies, president (2015)**



**Denise Minnie, president (current)**



competency in occupational audiometry are listed on the database as legally licensed to practice, as enforced by the Noise-Induced Hearing Loss Regulation of 2003. These paid-up members also receive regular, updated communications so that they adhere to relevant legislation and are kept abreast of all new information in the field of audiometry. The updated information is also widely spread via the chat line, the SASOHN website and the regional executive representatives.

Because occupational health nurses work independently and often in remote locations, it is not always easy to attend the regional meetings. The Yahoo chat line is always buzzing with questions and information, and this online communication platform continues to provide information to all our members. This form of communication is efficient, reliable, and helps our OHNPs keep abreast of new legislation, regulations and updates. It is also used to raise awareness and address issues that the OHNPs might encounter at their places of work. Most regions have gone a step further and ensured that members also make use of other forms of social media, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, as tools for an effective and readily available communication strategy.

In 2001, the national office was launched, initially for two hours per day. Due to the growing demand, a half-day position was soon considered and adopted. Recently, the workload and administration have expanded even further, so SASOHN has employed a full-time office administrator in the national office. The need for formal office space grew steadily as increased stakeholder and service provider meetings needed to be accommodated. On 15 August 2019, the SASOHN executive committee celebrated the official opening of the new SASOHN offices in Benoni, Gauteng. Past presidents, honorary life members, and the current executives were welcomed to celebrate this event.

The SASOHN logo was revised in 2008 and gazetted in November 2009 for public comment. In May 2010, it was accepted as a registered trademark by the (then) Department of Arts and Culture, and is the proud trademark of SASOHN today.

The need to grow and have high-quality occupational health centres across the country gave rise to the initial SASOHN audit tool that was developed in 2002. It was revised regularly to ensure that it kept abreast of what is required in the occupational health sphere. In 2013, SASOHN initiated the Auditors Course for the OHNP. The aim was to uplift and ensure that the highest level of occupational healthcare services was rendered. SASOHN is proud of its own internal auditors across the country.

## AWARDS

Through the years, SASOHN has introduced many awards that recognise occupational health nurse excellence. The following awards hold great inspiration, value, and honour amongst our own members.

### Ian Webster Gold Medal

Professor Ian Webster donated the Ian Webster Gold Medal to SASOHN in 1998 on his retirement from the (then) National Centre for Occupational Health. This medal was initially awarded on an annual basis to an outstanding student who had completed a diploma-level course in occupational health nursing and who was a paid-up member of SASOHN. Ian Webster was a source of inspiration and always encouraged nurses working in the occupational health field to further their studies. Due to changes in South African education, the SASOHN executive committee decided to award

the medal to an outstanding student who completed a Master's degree in occupational health. The medal is now awarded on an annual basis to a student who achieves a Master's degree or PhD degree in occupational health nursing from an accredited tertiary institution, and who is a current SASOHN member.

### Ian Webster Silver Medal

The Silver Medal was donated by SASOHN in 1998, to be awarded on an annual basis to an outstanding student who completed a diploma-level course in occupational health nursing. Due to changes in South African education, the SASOHN executive committee decided to award the medal to an outstanding student who completed a BTech degree in occupational health nursing. The medal is now awarded to the student who achieves the highest final mark for a BTech degree in occupational health nursing, as listed with the SANC through an accredited tertiary institution. The student must not previously have written the examination, the final mark must exceed a 75% average, and the degree must be completed in the minimum duration of one year (full-time) or two years (part time).

### Janet Taylor Award

The Distance Learning Trophy was donated to the Society by the Vaal Triangle Regional Society of Occupational Health Nurses in 1987 to be awarded to an outstanding student who has completed a course in occupational health nursing on a self-study, distance-learning basis.

In 1998, it was decided to give the award on an annual basis to the best student who completed either a distance or certificate course. The Vaal region later requested that the award be renamed the Janet Taylor Award. Today, the annual trophy is presented to students who achieve the highest average marks in an advanced diploma in occupational health nursing, as listed with the SANC, through an accredited tertiary institution. The student's final mark must exceed a 75% average and be completed in the minimum duration of one year (full time) or two years (part time).

### President's Award

Bernadine Kuchinski, on behalf of the Scientific Committee on Occupational Health (SCOHN), presented a silver bowl to SASOHN at the 1997 Pan-African Congress on Occupational Health in Durban. It was decided to use the gift as a trophy for the Occupational Health Nursing Practitioner of the Year Award. In 2008, sponsorship and a new trophy for the OHNP of the Year Award were offered by IsoMetrix Software Solutions, and the SASOHN executive committee agreed to use the SCOHN bowl for the President's Award in the future. In 2010, the trophy was replaced with a new trophy and the old trophy was kept in the national office. The president may award the trophy at the end of each two-year term to the executive committee member who distinguished her/himself during the year. The award is not made to the committee member with the most portfolios, but to the person who excelled in the functions, he/she accepted as an executive committee representative.

### Mentor of the Year

This floating trophy is awarded to the SASOHN member who is identified and nominated as the SASOHN Mentor of the Year. The mentor must be nominated by a tertiary institution, a mentee



or a peer. Although recognition through the Mentor Certificate of Recognition is made available to all OHNPs who are paid-up SASOHN members, and have mentored at least one learner through an accredited academic programme, there can only be one winner of the trophy. Through the years, many occupational health nurses have been dedicated to fulfilling their teaching role with the novice student and/or novice OHN. SASOHN is deeply grateful to all of them for keeping the lamp burning for occupational health. SASOHN looks forward to receiving nominations for Mentor of the Year for 2020 to concurrently celebrate the WHO's *Year of the Nurse and Midwife*.

### SASOHN – Best Journal Article of the Year

This annual certificate, awarded together with a floating trophy, was initiated by past president Dr Karen Michell, in 2010. It recognises novice writers who are SASOHN members and who contribute to the knowledge base of OH, by publishing either a back-to-basics article and/or an original research article in



**Awarding the OHNP of the Year trophy at the 2005 AGM gala dinner**



**SASOHN's first president (1980), Stella Coetzee, and Karen Michell receiving awards at the AGM gala evening in 2005**

*Occupational Health Southern Africa*. Although their MSc and PhD publications are acknowledged as highly valuable by the two SASOHN representatives on the Journal editorial board, the weighting of the score matrix is in favour of the novice writer. This is to encourage and develop confidence in OHNPs who do not yet have the writing skills to contribute to evidence-based practice in the field and need assistance to develop these skills. They can start by writing simple case reports.

### SASOHN – Best Conference Poster (research and non-research)

The award of this annual certificate was initiated by the past president, Dr Karen Michell, at the SASOHN National Conference in eThekweni, Durban, in 2002. This was inspired by the interprofessional poster presentations at International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) conferences. There was, unfortunately, a slow decline in poster submissions from about 2012. The poster competition was revived by Dr Penny Orton in 2015, a past educational representative, and further refined by Angie Butkovic in 2017. SASOHN's poster competition continues to evolve, and now showcases two award categories (a research category and a non-research category) with a refined poster design guideline and scoring matrix. The poster competition encourages interprofessional occupational health and/or safety professionals to exhibit significant evidence-based information from the workplace and/or from formal research at national SASOHN events, as well as at international events such as ICOH conferences.

### OHNP of the Year Award

This annual floating trophy is awarded to an individual OHNP who has excelled in service delivery in an occupational health setting. The trophy was donated to SASOHN and was first awarded to a recipient in 2002. The nominees must have been employed in their current clinic for a minimum of one calendar year and have produced a self-audit using the SASOHN audit tool. The regional societies then determine, through a regional audit, whether the candidate has met the required criteria. This is no easy task as the candidate needs to achieve 90% or more to qualify for the next verification audit. The best two candidates compete against each other for the winner in the category.

### Corporate OHNP of the Year Award

This floating trophy is awarded to the corporate OHNP of the year. Occupational Care South Africa (OCSA) donated the trophy in 2008. It is awarded to an OHNP who is employed by a company that provides support in the delivery of occupational health services. This is the provision of policies, procedures and other support material. The same process is followed for the nominee as for the individual OHNP of the Year Award.

The above Awards are what make our gala dinners at the AGM exciting and memorable. Each regional society feels proud when a member from their region achieves any of these awards.

In 2020, the theme for the gala dinner will be *The Night of the Oscars*, which promises poise, glamour and loads of cheerfulness.

SASOHN has, for many years, generously provided bursary and sponsorship support, despite its limited funds as a non-profit organisation, to its qualifying members who seek to develop their professional status in the field of occupational health. SASOHN has

proudly been able to increase sponsorship of its members to the Academic Days, the SASOHN annual conferences and ICOH events. There are specific criteria that should be met. The investment is beneficial to all members, as the empowered member is only released from the agreement once she/he has provided a detailed report that can be distributed to all members. This enables all members access to at least partial knowledge of content that affects practice.

Last, the SASOHN objectives serve the four pillars of the Society. These objectives are communicated to members at the national AGM for regions to implement timeously. The current objectives are:

**1. To upgrade and maintain the professional image of occupational health, which is achieved through:**

- a. Improving the standards and professional qualifications in occupational health nursing
- b. Marketing the SASOHN brand to Government, the SANC, Department of Health (DoH), Department of Employment and Labour (DEL), National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), Nursing Education Association (NEA), ICOH, Department of Mineral Resources (DMR), SCOHN, Medical Education Centre (MEC), PCB, and trade unions
- c. Upgrading of the SASOHN website to ensure all information is accessible to our members
- d. Identifying relevant research projects and supporting current OHN students in research with the assistance of the regional and national educational representatives, and the active participation of our members to complete the questionnaires, interviews, interventions, etc.
- e. Motivating the above students to publish at least one article in *Occupational Health Southern Africa* and present at the SASOHN Academic Days as an inspiration and motivation for others to follow

**2. To build relations with other professional bodies involved in occupational health, which is achieved through:**

- a. SASOHN being represented and playing the role of active and positive change agents on committees of organisations such as the SANC, DoH, DOL, NIOH, Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa (DENOSA), NEA, ICOH, SCOHN, MEC, PCB and trade unions
- b. These representatives providing quarterly reports at the SASOHN executive meetings, which are then cascaded down to the regions to be communicated to members

**3. To revisit back-to-basics principles in occupational health practice, which is achieved through:**

- a. The regional society educational representatives reviewing members' learning needs to align them with the SANC continuing professional development (CPD) domains in the annual academic regional programmes and workshops, accordingly
- b. Assisting students through the ongoing supportive structured mentorship programmes
- c. Receiving at least two regional articles per region for the annual newsletter, per year
- d. Submitting at least one regional article per region for *Occupational Health Southern Africa*



**SASOHN executives meeting with the DoL in 2003**

**4. To enhance awareness of national policies and guidelines affecting occupational health practice, which is achieved through:**

- a. Addressing at least one national document (policy/guideline/rules of procedure) at each regional meeting
- b. Updating and reviewing all national and regional SASOHN documents to align with the ISO standards of 9001:2015
- c. Ensuring all SASOHN documents are available centrally from the SASOHN national office (regional societies can access these documents through the website portal)
- d. Ensuring the updated SASOHN guidelines are available to paid-up members by January of each year. These guidelines are also put onto a compact disk (CD) and distributed at the Academic Days
- e. Making the SASOHN guidelines available to the lecturers and students registered with tertiary institutions at a discounted rate

Currently, SASOHN's office bearers are drafting new objectives as part of the Society's five-year plan. These will concentrate on the continual improvement of occupational health services to enable effective, efficient, reliable and high standards of occupational healthcare. More focus will be placed on the quality of occupational health services that incorporate innovative technology and research that will assist the Society in achieving its objectives. Another important aspect of the objectives is to address the compliance and legal frameworks that are required by members at their places of employment. For this to happen, strategies for continual improvement in communication and awareness will be necessary for all members. We hope to achieve this by using our website and other social media platforms where members can get the information first hand. The CPD pilot study that was conducted by the Western Cape region highlighted the use of podcasting that could be used by the members. Currently, members are encouraged to use MedTalkz. As a value-added benefit to members, the new website will be assisting members to track their CPD progress.

The year 2020 holds a special place in our hearts as SASOHN will mark 40 years of existence and, as one can see, this non-profit organisation has grown from strength to strength. Today, SASOHN stands proudly with a membership of more than 1 300, which includes international and affiliated members. SASOHN will continue with the improvement and quality of occupational health services in southern Africa. SASOHN will lead this trend by equipping the OHNPs with loads of valuable information, refined skills, encouragement and enhanced aptitude to function as Advanced Nurse Practitioners and specialists in occupational health.