

SASOM news

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ICOH2024 CONGRESS IN MARRAKESH, MOROCCO: THE WRAP-UP

- Accepted abstracts were published in July 2024 as open access Proceedings of the 34th International Congress on Occupational Health (ICOH2024) of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH), in an online supplement of *Occupational Medicine*, one of the key international journals in its field and part of the Oxford Academic, Oxford University Press (OUP) platform, with an impact factor of 5.1. To view the published abstracts, please visit the following link: https://academic.oup.com/occmed/issue/74/Supplement_1
- The newly elected ICOH Officers and Board members for the current triennium (2024–2027) took up office at the end of the ICOH2024 Congress, holding their first meetings in Marrakesh. The South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM), the only affiliate ICOH member from Africa, wishes the newly elected incumbents all of the best for a healthy, safe, productive, and rewarding tenure.
- A photographic compilation of the ICOH2024 Congress can be accessed here: https://www.occhealth.co.za/pdf/ICOH2024_Congress.pdf

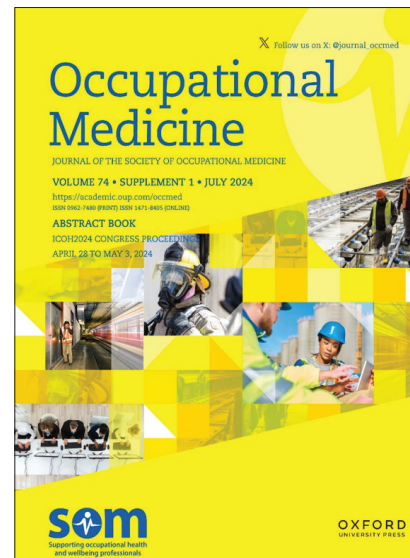


Image: courtesy of ICOH



A new broom sweeps clean – ICOH movers and shakers for the current triennium (2024–2027)

Newly elected ICOH Board members, standing, L to R: Charles Yarborough (USA), Akizumi Tsutsumi (Japan), Quentin Durand-Moreau (Canada), Rim El Kholti (Morocco), Stefan Esser (Germany), R Rajesh (India), Alexis Descatha (France), Riitta Sauni (Finland), Mahinda Seneviratne (Australia), Ashish Mishra (India), Kamal Wifaq (Morocco), and Dongmug Kang (Republic of Korea). ICOH Officers, seated, L to R: Jukka Takala (Past President, Finland), Martin Hogan (Vice President for Scientific Committees, Ireland), Seong-Kyu Kang (President, Republic of Korea), Diana Gagliardi (Secretary General, Italy), and Shyam Pingle (Vice President for National Secretaries, India). Absent ICOH Board members: Rosylane Rocha (Brazil), Giovanna Spatari (Italy), Aida Fajardo Montiel (Mexico), and Naesinee Chaiear (Thailand)

Photograph: courtesy of the ICOH Secretariat (Italy)

SASOM NATIONAL ROADSHOW 2024

The National Roadshow initiative replaces SASOM's annual congress and is aimed at addressing the challenges faced by occupational medicine practitioners (OMPs) and enhancing SASOM's visibility in the occupational health and medicine community after a four-year absence of face-to-face scientific events. The Roadshow was organised in response to the multiple concerns raised by OMPs regarding service provision by non-OMPs, convoluted and illegal business settings, and unethical practices in the field of occupational medicine.

The theme of the 2024 Roadshow is *Occupational Medicine is a highly specific discipline in workers' health* and its objectives are: 1) to address OMP challenges and provide solutions through interactive sessions, 2) to resume in-person visibility of SASOM and strengthen its presence in the occupational health community, 3) to offer Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for SASOM member OMPs, 4) to facilitate networking among attendees and engagement with key stakeholders, and 5) to provide community services aimed at improving occupational health services for employers and employees.

By providing a platform for discussion, learning, and collaboration, it is envisioned that the Roadshow will directly contribute to the enhancement of occupational health standards and practices. To this end, three sessions with individual sub-themes have been arranged from July to October 2024, culminating in the SASOM annual general meeting (AGM) and associated academic day, in Cape Town on Saturday, 9 November 2024, which will be hosted by the SASOM Western Cape Chapter. Each Roadshow session has been accredited by the South African Medical Association (SAMA) for four Ethical Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points for full attendance.

Session 1: 'Occupational Medicine as a peer-based discipline'

The first session was held on Wednesday, 3 July 2024 (in hybrid format) in Gqeberha, and was chaired by Mrs Claudia Frost (SASOM National Office Coordinator). Three invited speakers delivered four presentations aligned with the session theme.

- Dr Jan Lapere (private practitioner in occupational medicine, medico-legal and social labour law, Gqeberha, South Africa) presented 'The employer's occupational health duty and South Africa's legal framework for occupational medicine', and 'The knowledge needed by the (non-medical) attendees to make the right decision in terms of occupational medical services and identify and deal with the perverse practices by unqualified service providers'. Take-home messages included: 1) the OMP must practice in a manner consistent with the ethical and legal duties of healthcare practitioners, 2) beyond the natural duties and moral obligations applicable to all registered medical practitioners, the OMP has specific institutional and legal duties, 3) the nature of occupational medical practice requires the management of dual responsibilities, 4) selecting and appointing the appropriate OMP is not without pitfalls – key parameters to consider include the doctor's qualifications, registration, experience, knowledge, technological proficiency, professional competence, ethics, communication skills, professionalism, and positive references, and 5) it is important that employers can identify and avoid engagement with prevailing perverse practices by unqualified service providers.
- Dr Haidee M Williams (specialist occupational medicine consultant and honorary senior lecturer at the School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa) presented

'The role of OMPs in the chemical industry' and highlighted that: 1) the OMP plays a vital role within the chemical industry, and knowledge of the innate harmfulness of the chemical(s) guides the OMP in establishing the medical surveillance test selection and the medical exclusions or restrictions, 2) the OMP is responsible for identification of early adverse effects as well as occupational disease management, and 3) the OMP plays an important role in education and training of workers, and in identifying trends from medical surveillance data and reporting the findings to the company's Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) Committee.

- Dr Alex Govender (private occupational medicine practitioner, Uitenhage, Eastern Cape, South Africa) presented 'Occupational health practice in China: What are the realities?'. Take-home messages from his personal experience of working in China for a number of years were: 1) China is a fast-growing economic power, rapidly catching up to the leading countries of the world and becoming a major contributor to globalisation, 2) with the growth of business opportunities in China, many health challenges have emerged, 3) to cope with these health challenges, China has enacted a number of laws and regulations and has shown the most regulatory activity in the south-eastern Asia region by strictly enforcing laws and imposing stringent penalties, and 4) whilst legislation and enforcement in China are regarded as strict, the actual practice of providing occupational health services is very different to South Africa.

Session 2: 'Peer-review networking of OMPs'

The second session was held on Wednesday, 14 August 2024 (in virtual format only), and was chaired by Ms Claudina Nogueira (SASOM ExCo member and ICOH National Secretary for South Africa). Four invited speakers delivered four presentations aligned with the session's theme.

- Dr Jan Lapere presented 'The scope of profession of OMPs' and highlighted that: 1) registered OMPs must conform to all the ethical rules and duties of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), 2) the clinical scope of practice of OMPs includes fitness for work, health screening and medical surveillance, health and wellness promotion, ill health work capacity and rehabilitation, fitness for duty, workplace injury and disease management, primary health care, and wellness, 3) non-clinical functions of OMPs include workplace risk assessments, the development and management of risk-based employer occupational health services, occupational health and medico-legal governance, training, health and wellness promotion at work, and emergency planning, and 4) there are specific pitfalls with respect to supersession, dealing with the professional reputation of colleagues, professional confidentiality, signing official documents, certificates, and reports, professional registration and appointments, exploitation, and the reporting of impairment or of unprofessional, illegal, or unethical conduct.
- Dr Jesne Kistan (specialist in public health medicine and palliative medicine at the Association of Palliative Care Practitioners of South Africa (PALPRAC) and Zazen Respite Care, Gauteng, South Africa) presented 'An overview of palliative care: Why does it matter to occupational health practitioners (OHPs)?', which focused on empowering practitioners with the basics of palliative care to improve the quality of life of patients with serious, irreversible disease. She discussed the following: 1) palliative care is specialised medical care for patients with serious illnesses, and not only for terminally ill patients, 2) the World Health Organization advocates

for palliative care to begin at the diagnosis of a serious illness, alongside curative care, 3) OHPs may encounter patients with severe, irreversible illness as a result of work-related diseases, 4) many of these patients are not referred to palliative care practitioners due to lack of practitioner knowledge, fear of introducing palliative care to patients and removing hope, and common misconceptions regarding palliative care, and 5) palliative care teams are composed of various specialties working together to support patients.

- Dr Nicholas van der Water (lead physician at Medmark Occupational Healthcare, Galway, Ireland) presented 'Different but good: A tale of an OMP's journey to the Emerald Isle'. He explored the differences and similarities between occupational medicine practices in Ireland and South Africa, through the lens of an occupational physician who trained in South Africa and transitioned to practice in Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic. He discussed the topics of training, guidelines that inform practice, and peer-review networking of OMPs, aiming to highlight areas where OMPs in these two distinct regions could learn from and support each other in ongoing practice and promotion of the speciality in their separate jurisdictions. In his animated presentation, Dr van de Water also shared learnings and personal anecdotes from integrating into the Irish system.
- Dr Geoffrey Tafaune (lecturer and occupational medicine specialist at the University of Pretoria and Gauteng Department of Health, Pretoria, South Africa) presented 'Lower back pain evaluation by the OMP: Remember the red and yellow flags'. Points of discussion included: 1) chronic low back pain is a common problem in the workplace, with a lifetime prevalence of more than 80%, 2) a good history, thorough physical examination, and appropriate special investigations should place patients into one of several categories of lower back pain, which can then be managed according to specific directives, 3) paracetamol and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are first-line medications for chronic low back pain, although other classes of medication may benefit some patients who do not respond to such drugs, and 4) alternative therapies such as acupuncture, exercise therapy, multidisciplinary rehabilitation programmes, massage, behaviour therapy, and spinal manipulation are effective in certain clinical situations. Dr Tafaune stressed the importance of multidisciplinary teams in the management of chronic lower back pain and emphasised that most patients will not benefit from surgery, hence it is of paramount importance for the OMP to remember the red and yellow flags of low back pain, as discussed, when evaluating clinical cases.

Session 3: 'Duties and responsibilities of occupational medicine practitioners' will be held in hybrid format at the Incredible India Restaurant and Conference Centre, The Pearls of Umhlanga, Durban on Wednesday 16 October 2024 and will be hosted by the SASOM KwaZulu-Natal Chapter.

CONGRATULATIONS AND CELEBRATIONS

SASOM is proud to congratulate Dr Vanessa Govender, member of ICOH and the Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA), on the publication and official launch of her book titled *From Suspicion to Submission: Occupational Lung Diseases in the South African Mining Industry* – a handbook for occupational medicine practitioners in South Africa and beyond. Her book is "dedicated to all workers who mine – past, present, and future".



Publish, release, launch and celebrate

The official unveiling of *From Suspicion to Submission: Occupational Lung Diseases in the South African Mining Industry* was held at the Wits School of Public Health on 28 August 2024. As part of the programme, the author, Dr Vanessa Govender (left), gave an address, which was followed by an interview. Claudina Nogueira (right) attended the launch in her personal capacity as an invited guest, and also represented SASOM in her capacity of SASOM ExCo member (co-opted)

Photograph: courtesy of Vanessa Govender

Dr Govender is a specialist in occupational medicine with more than 30 years of experience in the mining industry, where she advises, diagnoses, treats, and manages cases of occupational lung disease for compensation claims. She is currently the Director of Masakhane Strategic Health Consulting (Pty) Ltd, an honorary lecturer in the Wits School of Public Health, an associate member of the Colleges of Public Health Medicine of South Africa, and a member of the Tshiamiso Trust's Medical Advisory Panel. The Tshiamiso Trust manages thousands of claims for mineworkers eligible for compensation due to contracting tuberculosis or silicosis from working in certain gold mines.

In the words of the book reviewer, Jack Parker, MD – Professor Emeritus of Medicine, Radiology, Public Health, Occupational and Environmental Health Sciences, West Virginia University, USA: "With the rich history of internationally recognised scientific excellence in occupational lung diseases that resides in South Africa, it is not surprising that an elegant handbook such as this one should have been written by a South African occupational medicine specialist. It is clearly a labour of love and the product of a desire to share knowledge, driven by the noble cause of prevention of occupational respiratory diseases".

The book is published by [MettaMedia Publishing \(Pty\) Ltd](https://www.mettamedia.com) and was edited by Prof. Gill Nelson, editor of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* and Head of the Occupational Health Division, Wits School of Public Health. The book is available for purchase on the Takealot online platform (<https://www.takealot.com/occupational-lung-diseases-in-the-south-african-mining-industry/PLID95935248>). 