SASOM news

Claudina Nogueira: Occupational health consultant; SASOM ExCo member; ICOH National Secretary for South Africa (2024–2027); WHWB President (2024–2025)
e-mail: claudinanogueira@hotmail.com
Daan Kocks: SASOM Chair
e-mail: daniel.kocks@up.ac.za
Claudia Frost: SASOM National Office Coordinator
e-mail: office@sasom.org

SASOM ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024

The South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) hosted its annual conference on Saturday, 9 November 2024, in association with the SASOM Annual General Meeting (AGM). The last SASOM ExCo meeting of the year was held on Friday, 8 November 2024. The three events, hosted by the SASOM Western Cape Chapter, were held in hybrid format, at the Vineyard Hotel, Newlands, Cape Town, using the SASOM Zoom platform. SASOM takes this opportunity to thank the organisation that provided the exhibition and sponsorship for the conference: Tealio – Occupational Health Software for Workplaces and Educational Institutions (www.tealio.ai), represented by Benjamin Amoils and his team.

The conference was themed *Occupational health in the digital age: navigating the challenges,* and was accredited by the South African Medical Association (SAMA) for seven Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points/units for full attendance (one ethics and six clinical points). The conference was opened by the SASOM Chair, Prof. Daan Kocks, who welcomed the 37 onsite and 91 online delegates.

Two chairs are better than one
Dr Itumeleng Ntatamala, SASOM Western Cape Chapter and UCT (L) and Dr Geoffrey Tafaune, SASOM Treasurer, Gauteng Department of Health and Wellness, and University of Pretoria (R), co-chaired the sessions of the SASOM Annual Conference 2024
Photograph: Claudina Nogueira (South Africa)

The morning session was chaired by Dr Itumeleng Mtatamala, occupational medicine specialist and senior lecturer from the University of Cape Town (UCT). Four presentations were delivered:

- Dr William Kleynhans (Cipla South Africa, and Ocule Health) presented 'Data-driven workplace health: using AI and big data to predict and prevent workplace injuries and diseases'.
- Prof. Rodney Ehrlich (UCT) presented 'Understanding the challenges of using computer-aided detection for occupational tuberculosis and silicosis'.
- Prof. Shahieda Adams (UCT) presented 'Mental health in the digital age: navigating the challenges of the hyperconnected workplace and 24/7 work cycle'.
- Dr Zahida Sonday (Western Cape Government Health and Wellness (WCGHW)) presented 'Case studies: Occupational Health and Safety Information System (OHASIS) – reflections on introducing digital health technologies into an existing occupational health programme'.

The afternoon session was chaired by Dr Geoffrey Tafaune (Gauteng Department of Health and Wellness, and the University of Pretoria). Two presentations were delivered, followed by a panel discussion:

- Dr Nomonde Buyiswe Mabuya-Moloele (Qalo Digihealth (Pty) Ltd) presented 'Delivery of workplace health and wellness in the digital age: integrating 4IR technology and wearables in the workplace'.
- Dr Jan Lapere (Private practitioner – occupational medicine, medico-legal and social labour law, Gqeberha, and SASOM ExCo member) presented 'Ethical and legal considerations for using wearables and other worker monitoring digital technologies in the workplace'.
- Dr Casper Joubert (Tygerberg Hospital, Cape Town) chaired a panel discussion on 'The future of work in the digital age: what the next decade holds'. Panel members were Prof. Mohamed Jeebhay (UCT), Dr Shamila Fakie (Medscheme Holdings, South Africa), and Dr Marion Morkel (Sanlam, South Africa).

SASOM ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2024: A YEAR IN REVIEW

The AGM followed the conference. Prof. Daan Kocks (SASOM Chair) read the 2024 annual report prepared by the SASOM 2024 National Secretary, Dr Frank Fox, and highlighted the several activities and outcomes in 2024.

SASOM National Office

- The SASOM office bearers for 2025 are Prof. Daan Kocks (Chair), Dr André Kotzé (Vice Chair), Dr Frank Fox (Secretary), and Dr Geoffrey Tafaune (Treasurer).

- As of 31 October 2024, SASOM had 459 members, including nine honorary members. By mid-February 2025, following a membership marketing and renewal drive, 176 members (38%) had renewed their memberships, and 12 new members (1%) had joined the Society. SASOM members also reside in Botswana, Canada, Namibia, Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom, and other countries.

SASOM awards

- In recognition of their unwavering dedication and contributions to the fields of occupational medicine and occupational health, SASOM bestowed honorary membership awards on Dr Jan Lapere and Dr André Kotzé.
- Ludwick Lebaka (Sibanye Stillwater) was the winner of the SASOM Annual Author Prize for 2023. On behalf of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, SASOM encourages researchers working in the field of occupational health to publish their research findings. SASOM provides a cash award to a novice author who is the first author of the best paper published in the Journal in a calendar year. Membership of SASOM is not a criterion.

SASOM Guidelines

SASOM Guidelines are provided to members in good standing, at no cost. Efforts to update and standardise the Guidelines continued throughout the year. Two Guidelines were updated during 2024, viz. 'Alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace' and 'Ethics and professional conduct for occupational medicine practitioners'. A third update is currently under review – 'Radiation and heat exposure'.

SASOM website

- From November 2023 to October 2024, unique visitors to the website totalled more than 6 000. This highlights the importance of a user-friendly and informative digital platform.
- SASOM expanded its online presence with the creation of Facebook and LinkedIn pages, with the intent of increasing member engagement, sharing industry updates, promoting events, and fostering professional networking within the occupational medicine community.

SASOM and *Occupational Health Southern Africa*

- Prof. Daan Kocks thanked SASOM ExCo members, Claudina Nogueira, for her facilitation of the publication of SASOM's pages in the Journal, and Prof. Mary Ross and Mrs Claudia Frost (SASOM National Office Coordinator), for drafting and facilitating the CPD questionnaires based on the published content of *Occupational Health Southern Africa*, respectively. Members were able to earn three CPD/CEU points per questionnaire, potentially earning 12 points per annum. Despite the time and effort spent developing the questionnaires, participation from SASOM members is disappointingly low; less than 10% of members submitted answers to the questionnaires in 2024. Hence, SASOM will no longer offer the questionnaire for SASOM members to obtain CPD points.
- Prof. Daan Kocks wrote a guest editorial for the third issue of the Journal (July–September 2024). He raised the issue of the complexity of a competent person's knowledge and cognitive need to function in the world of occupational health.

SASOM liaison

- Formal communication with organisations engaged in the enhancement of occupational medicine continued with SASOM ExCo members (co-opted) from the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), the Compensation Commissioner (CC), the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH), the South African Society of Travel Medicine (SASTM), and the Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA).
- Liaison with other organisations continued, nationally and internationally, reinforcing SASOM's regional and global presence throughout 2024, and included the South African Department of Employment and Labour, the SAMA, the Council for Health Service Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSASA), the International Occupational Medicine Society Collaborative (IOMSC), and the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM).
- SASOM continues to provide professional advice and support to members upon request, and is fortunate to have access to top occupational medicine practitioners (OMPs) and a qualified OMP with an MLB (Master of Laws) degree to offer comprehensive guidance.

SASOM outlook for 2025

- 2024 was marked by progress and strategic investments aligned with SASOM's vision and mission. While financial challenges were noted, the strong asset base and non-operational income provided stability. The ongoing dedication of the SASOM National Office, branch representatives, and members is integral to these successes.
- SASOM aims to increase membership, expand event participation, and continue updating Guidelines. The 6% increase in membership fees for 2025 will support these objectives and sustain SASOM's strategic initiatives.

SASOM and ICOH activities in 2024

The ICOH Scientific Committee on Biohazards and Occupational Health, chaired by Prof. Mary Ross (specialist in occupational medicine, public health, and travel medicine; professor at the University of the Witwatersrand; and SASOM ExCo member), organised a webinar on 27 March 2024, titled 'Occupational infections: reports from South Africa'. The three talks were:

- 'Working remotely: cautionary tales from Africa': Dr Albie de Frey (International Health Management Consultants, Geneva; WHO Expert Roster on Travel Health)
- 'Q fever as an occupational disease': Prof. John Frean (Editor-in-Chief of *Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease*; National Health Laboratory Service; University of the Witwatersrand and University of Pretoria)
- 'COVID-19: strategies for healthier and safer workplaces in non-healthcare settings': Dr Itumeleng Ntatamala (UCT)

Several SASOM members participated in the planning and organisation of ICOH's 34th International Congress on Occupational Health (ICOH2024) in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 28 April to 3 May 2024. As an ICOH affiliate member, SASOM invited members in good standing, whose abstract submissions had been accepted for the ICOH2024 Congress, to apply for partial funding

to attend the congress; four members were sponsored. SASOM was instrumental in marketing the ICOH2024 Congress, by providing updates through the SASOM pages of *Occupational Health Southern Africa* during the two-year interval between the ICOH2022 Digital Congress and the ICOH2024 Congress, and a report on the congress. The first announcement of the 35th International Congress on Occupational Health (ICOH2027) in Mumbai, India, from 14 to 19 February 2027, was published on 4 March 2025 and can be accessed at: www.icohweb.org/site/multimedia/events/pdf/ICOH%202027%20FIRST%20ANNOUNCEMENT_hyperlinked.pdf

Claudina Nogueira (ICOH National Secretary (NS) for South Africa and SASOM ExCo member) collaborated with three other ICOH NSs from the 'global South' – Argentina, Colombia, and Peru – to offer a webinar titled, 'Occupational health and safety in mining: an overview of management, legislation, and current challenges in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)'. Dr Diana Cuervo, NS for Colombia, is thanked for personally covering the costs of the recordings and the translations of the presentation transcripts.

Webinars hosted by SASOM in 2024

SASOM held a National Roadshow in three sessions, on 3 July (hybrid format in Gqeberha), 14 August (virtual format), and 16 October 2024 (hybrid format in Umhlanga, Durban). The broad theme was *Occupational medicine is a highly specific discipline in workers' health*. The three sessions had their own sub-themes, viz. *Occupational medicine as a peer-based discipline, Peer-review networking of OMPs,* and *Duties and responsibilities of OMPs.* The Roadshow, which was accredited for CPD points by the SAMA, was organised in response to the many concerns raised by OMPs regarding service provision by non-OMPs, convoluted and illegal business settings, and unethical occupational medicine.

The SASOM Western Cape Chapter remained active throughout 2024 and hosted several webinars:

- 26 March – SASOM/MEDICHEM session: tackling chemical hazards in the workplace
- 14 May – Neurodiversity in the workplace: addressing the shape-shifting needs of neurodiverse adults
- 18 June – Aviation and maritime medicine: recent developments
- 6 August – Fitness to work: an update
- 17 September – i) Groote Schuur Hospital occupational medicine clinic case reviews, and ii) Incapacity management within a large organisation
- 27 October – Occupational medicine in practice: reflections by industry experts

SASOM supported the first (virtual) South African National Symposium on Occupational Heat Exposure, organised by the Discipline of Occupational and Environmental Health, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. The two days (25–26 November 2024) of stimulating discourse on occupational heat exposure convened international experts, senior government policymakers, researchers, and occupational health professionals to address a most pressing and emerging global issue in the workplace.

AROUND THE WORLD IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

WHWB is the newest ICOH affiliate member

Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB), an international non-profit volunteer organisation, became an ICOH affiliate member in February 2025. WHWB (International) is a registered Canadian charity with three independent branches in the United States (WHWB-US), United Kingdom (WHWB-UK), and Australia (WHWB-Australia); the WHWB-Africa branch is under development. WHWB's values and objectives are aligned with those of ICOH, and there are many synergies in terms of promoting and enabling good practices and expertise in global occupational health.

Founded by occupational hygienists in 2011, WHWB is a global network of concerned occupational health professionals who volunteer to advance WHWB's mission, viz. 'To prevent work-related disease and injury around the world through shared expertise, knowledge, and skills'. Membership is open to all those who share WHWB's goals and vision – 'Imagine a world where workers, their families and communities, do not get ill because of their work'. WHWB's primary focus is the health and safety of workers who have limited access to occupational health and hygiene expertise, whether in LMICs or richer nations.

To enable its mandates and activities, WHWB has various standing committees and working groups. The Healthcare and Heat Stress Working Groups are more recent additions to WHWB.

Examples of WHWB work include i) conducting occupational hygiene training sessions in collaboration with agencies and institutions in host countries, using training materials developed by the Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA) and delivered by professional occupational hygienists and occupational health professionals (WHWB is an accredited OHTA training provider); ii) conducting research to evaluate worker exposures to hazardous agents such as silica, asbestos, and chemicals; iii) assessing the health hazards of workers involved in waste handling and recycling; iv) connecting occupational health professionals around the world with experienced professionals, through a mentoring programme; v) advocacy, professional, and public awareness; and vi) capacity-building in occupational health and hygiene.

WHWB members organise, sponsor, and speak at seminars and other professional events, present to universities and schools, and are available to the media to discuss global occupational health and safety. During the Pandemic, WHWB held 22 webinars on topics related to COVID-19 and infection control and offered a webinar series on asbestos and silica exposure, including that from engineered stone countertops. Other topics were the impact of climate change on workers, innovative strategies for reaching rural workers, control-banding tools, and lessons learned from epidemics. All webinar recordings are available on the WHWB YouTube channel. A recent initiative undertaken by WHWB is the coordination of the 'Global Occupational Safety and Health (GOSH) Coalition', which emerged from the ICOH2024 Congress. The driving force was the conviction that occupational health and safety do not receive the global focus they deserve, considering their impact on global health. This is demonstrated by the almost three million work-related fatalities each year, over and above the 374 million non-fatal workplace injuries and diseases reported worldwide. GOSH issued a 'Call to Action' for occupational health and safety to be elevated on the global agenda, including several specific measures. To date, 18 organisations have participated in GOSH (including WHWB and ICOH).

See the WHWB website for more information, and the 2024 WHWB Progress Report.

The 52nd Annual MEDICHEM Conference 2025

MEDICHEM, another ICOH affiliate member, is a global organisation dedicated to occupational and environmental health within the chemical industry. The 52nd Annual MEDICHEM Conference was held

at the Burjeel Hospital in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE), on 17 and 18 February 2025. Themed *Sustainability and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) considerations in the chemical sector*, the conference convened industry experts and occupational and environmental health professionals to share knowledge, expertise, and advancements in chemical regulations, safety protocols, and best practices. Delegates and presenters joined to elevate industry standards, promote innovation, and contribute to the creation of a safer, more sustainable, and efficient industry.

Although the conference was held onsite in Abu Dhabi, several of the invited speakers presented virtually. Invited presentations are listed below:

- Bassel Elshaboury (Head of Marketing for Henkel Consumer Brands across the regions of Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, Central Asia, and Australia and New Zealand) presented 'Sustainability in the chemical industry'.
- Dr Tee Guidotti (consultant in health, safety, environment, sustainability, and occupational health and medicine, USA) presented (virtually) 'New challenges to sustainability in the chemical sector'.
- Dr Manijeh Berenji (Chief of Occupational Health at VA Long Beach Healthcare System and Lead of Academic and Community Partnerships at the University of California Center for Climate, Health and Equity, USA) presented (virtually) 'Innovations in chemical risk management: harnessing the power of health informatics'.
- Dr Ade Mutiara (occupational health and medicine specialist and Secretary of the ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Medicine, Indonesia) presented 'Occupational health, technology, and ESG in the chemical industry'.
- Dr Sunisa Chaiklieng (professor of occupational health and safety and Head of the Department of Occupational Safety and Environmental Health, Faculty of Public Health, Khon Kaen University, Thailand) presented 'Automotive gasoline: history and issues of chemical exposure and risk assessment for occupational health surveillance'.
- Dr Aida Lucia Fajardo Montiel (chemical engineer and research professor in engineering and technology, University of Guadalajara, Mexico) presented (virtually) 'Assisting small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by providing essential information on occupational health in the context of ESG: insights from Mexico and Latin America'.
- Nanisuria Aris (certified occupational hygienist and Lead of Industrial Hygiene in a major oil and gas company, Qatar) presented 'Occupational heat stress: reducing health risks through simple interventions in high-exposure environments using the ESG strategy of sustainability'.
- Prof. Janvier Gasana (professor of occupational and environmental medicine (OEM), Founder/Chair of Global Applied Prevention Center Inc. (GAPCI), USA, and current Chair of MEDICHEM's Education Development Training) presented 'Global lead exposure among children and the general population'.
- Prof. Marianne Cloeren (associate professor in the Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Department of Medicine, University of Maryland School of Medicine, USA) presented (virtually) 'Leveraging OEM expertise to prepare organisations for the ESG challenges presented by climate change'.
- Dr Kaveri Rangappa (medical professional, public health and AI specialist advancing innovative solutions in digital modelling, India) presented (virtually) a documentary titled *The legacy of toxic waste unfolds: unveiling the chemical crisis in the Middle East*.
- Dr Sami Bég (physician executive with extensive expertise in healthcare, specialising in preventive medicine, population health, and digital health, USA) presented (virtually) 'Fostering lifestyle at work: a catalyst for occupational health and ESG in the chemical industry'.

52nd MEDICHEM Annual Conference, Abu Dhabi, presenters and organisers
L to R: Dr Ashish Mishra (Chief Health and Wellbeing Officer, Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL), ICOH and MEDICHEM Board member, Vice President of the Indian Association of Occupational Health (IAOH), India); Dr Ade Mutiara (Secretary of the ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Medicine, Indonesia); Dr Alex Govender (SASOM member, South Africa); Prof. Ibrahim Bani (Yale University, USA, Sudan and UAE); Prof. Janvier Gasana (Founder/Chair of Global Applied Prevention Center Inc. (GAPCI), and Chair of MEDICHEM's Education Development Training, USA); Dr Nahyan Helal (consultant specialist in occupational medicine and occupational health, UAE); Dr Samah Nur (Sudanese American who manages a clinic in UAE); Prof. Sunisa Chaiklieng (Faculty of Public Health, Khon Kaen University, Thailand); and Fahad Al Saiqal (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company – ADNOC)
Photograph: Courtesy of Prof. Janvier Gasana (USA)

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque
The largest place of worship in the UAE, a centre for learning about Islam and culture in Abu Dhabi, and one of the country's most important tourist attractions. L to R: Dr Basheer Ahamed Taj (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company – ADNOC); Dr Ade Mutiara (Secretary of the ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Medicine, Indonesia); Dr Alex Govender (SASOM member, South Africa); and Prof. Sunisa Chaiklieng (Faculty of Public Health, Khon Kaen University, Thailand)
Photograph: Dr Ade Mutiara (Indonesia)

- Dr Ashish Mishra (Chief Health and Wellbeing Officer, Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL), ICOH and MEDICHEM Board member, Vice President of the Indian Association of Occupational Health (IAOH), India) presented 'MEDICHEM and the ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry', and moderated a panel titled 'Multidisciplinary approach to ESG in the chemical sector'.
- Claudina Nogueira (occupational health consultant and medical biochemist, ICOH National Secretary for South Africa, President of WHWB, and SASOM ExCo member, South Africa) presented (virtually) 'Occupational health in the global context of sustainability – ICOH's past and present role'.

ICOH SC AP and IOSH host a joint webinar on asbestos and silica hazards

The ICOH Scientific Committee on Accident Prevention (SC AP), chaired by Dr Karen Michell, and the Construction Group of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH, UK), vice-chaired by Dr Shaun Lundy, hosted a webinar on 30 January 2025, titled 'Tackling asbestos and silica hazards: lessons for occupational safety and health professionals'. The objectives of the webinar were i) to explore the health consequences of asbestos and silica exposure, including asbestosis, silicosis, and mesothelioma, ii) to gain insights into the UK asbestos ban, Australia's engineered stone ban, and their implications for workplace safety, iii) to recognise environments and practices that pose risks for high-silica and asbestos exposure, and iv) to discuss the critical role of occupational health and safety professionals in preventing exposure, managing risks, and protecting workers' health through practical measures and best practices. Dr Kevin Hedges (WHWB Board member and Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (OHCOW), Canada) was invited to provide a background to asbestos and silica use, to set the scene on global aspects of asbestos and silica, and to participate in a discussion panel with Dr Shaun Lundy, moderated by Dr Karen Michell. Close to 900 participants attended the webinar from around the globe, mostly from the UK (493), followed by South Africa (81), Ireland (37), the UAE (33), the USA (31), and Saudi Arabia (25). The recording of the webinar is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0q4XITUeF8.

IMPORTANT UPDATE FROM THE SASOM NATIONAL OFFICE: ADDRESSING RECENT TECHNICAL CHALLENGES AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

SASOM is appreciative of its members' patience and continued support as it navigates operational challenges that have recently impacted its response times. At the start of the year, SASOM experienced technical disruptions following multiple hacking attempts and a Microsoft upgrade, which affected e-mail systems. As part of the resolution, SASOM introduced a new correspondence e-mail address, office@sasom.org, which was communicated to members via e-mail, WhatsApp, and the website on 6 February 2025.

While the website remained fully operational – allowing members to sign up, log in to the member zone, renew their membership, print certificates, and access all SASOM resources – some members made direct bank payments without following the online renewal process. Since financial reconciliations are not conducted daily, this resulted in a delay in granting platform and resource access to said members. Coupled with the existing backlog, this caused concern among members.

SASOM is taking several measures to improve its service delivery and ensure a smoother experience for all members, including:

- Automation and process efficiency – members are encouraged to complete renewals via the online platform to ensure faster processing and minimise the administrative burden (www.sasom.org/membership)
- Enhanced communication – more effective interaction channels are being streamlined to provide faster updates on service disruptions
- Process optimisation – SASOM is refining its financial reconciliation and membership verification procedures to reduce delays
- Improved system stability – the recent e-mail system changes aim to enhance reliability and reduce technical disruptions

The online process maintains efficiency, ensures timely access to services, and minimises administrative costs and fees. Please note that an additional administrative fee of R75 will be charged for any manual renewals of SASOM membership.

SASOM deeply values its members' ongoing support and trust in the Society, and appreciates their patience and understanding as it continues to streamline and improve its operations.