From Suspicion to Submission: Occupational Lung Diseases in the South African Mining Industry

by Vanessa Govender

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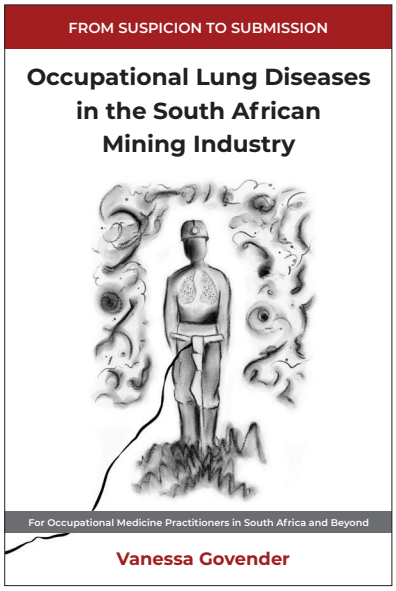
The subtitle of this handbook is limiting; while focused on occupational lung diseases (OLDs) in South Africa, it espouses invaluable principles and concepts in occupational health, specifically OLDs in mining settings, that are relevant to the entire African space. It includes Quick Reference Guides and chapters that extend beyond the South African legislative context, covering concepts that are relevant to most southern African states – many of whose citizens have worked or still work as migrants in the South African mining industry.

An expert in her field, Dr Govender meticulously explores the subject of OLDs, describing the case continuum from initial suspicion to diagnosis and compensation, in the context of South Africa. With abundant clarity in an easy-to-read yet detailed discourse, she provides a critical and well-researched account of OLDs and the lasting legacy of the mineral extractive industry in South Africa. This well researched book stands as an invaluable contribution to the scientific body of knowledge and illuminates the injustices of apartheid, poor regulatory frameworks, and inadequacies of occupational health services, including how they have influenced the patterns of mortality and morbidity in South Africa. Reflecting on both medical evidence and historical analysis, the book highlights the vulnerability of mineworkers and ex-mineworkers, even in the post-apartheid era.



While focused on South Africa, this handbook is highly relevant to mining health practitioners and policy makers across Africa – and beyond

The book is well ordered with each chapter providing a good foundation for subsequent chapters. It sets the context with a reflection on legislative and policy frameworks in South Africa, and further contextualises these by highlighting key international frameworks and guidelines. In Chapter 2, Dr Govender dissects occupational health principles of practice and key concepts with scientific precision and exactitude.

The book provides a holistic but simple approach to the interpretation of pulmonary and other medical tests. Its utility is epitomised in how it demystifies the perceived difficulties in interpreting spirograms. It will be of invaluable assistance to general practitioners and other related professionals who need to interpret spirometry test results accurately. The high prevalence of OLDs in Africa, against a background of a high burden of tuberculosis, presents a diagnostic challenge to most health practitioners. The inclusion of Quick Reference Guides for common OLDs, other OLDs, and post-mortem examinations provides a convenient, precise, and invaluable resource for clinicians. The Quick Reference Guides are powerful and concise, and explore the subject themes in the context of current evidence and practice. The book concludes with a succinct and precise description of benefit medical examinations (BMEs). It provides a comprehensive description of BMEs from definition, to the frequency of conducting these examinations, the requisite tests that should be part of the process, and the step-by-step process of submitting claims for compensation in South Africa.

This is an invaluable book, not only to occupational medical practitioners, but also to specialists, and related health professionals dealing with OLDs. Its utility extends to non-medical professionals in human resources, legal disciplines, and other disciplines. Its focus on policy and guidance on compensation processes makes it an important resource for national-level policy makers and implementers.

The book will also be of interest to students and practitioners working in occupational health and public health. Students undertaking postgraduate studies such as a Diploma in Occupational Health/Medicine, a Master's in Occupational Health, or a Master of Medicine (Occupational Medicine) will find this to be an invaluable resource, not only for South Africa, but for the entire global South. The book is also an important resource for those preparing for international examinations such as Membership Examinations in Occupational Medicine. It is a vital reference resource in the spirometry education space, especially regarding the interpretation of spirograms. Policy makers will find the book to be an invaluable reference guide for the development of policies related to OLDs. The author calls on policy makers to engage and focus on continuously improving the health of mineworkers and ex-mineworkers.

Congratulations to Dr Govender for producing this timely masterpiece, replete with a fountain of knowledge on diagnostic and management principles and procedures for OLDs.

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