SASOM news

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SASOM webinar to mark seventy years of occupational health

Prof. Daan Kocks, Chair of the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM), has announced that the Society will host a free webinar on 18 September 2026, honouring the 70th anniversaries of the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH, www.nioh.ac.za) and Stellenbosch University's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (https://www.su.ac.za/en/faculties/medicine/home). Both institutions trace their origins to 1956, and between them account for much of the research and training capacity that underpins occupational health practice in South Africa today. "It is a privilege to mark these two anniversaries together", says Prof. Kocks. "Seventy years of institutional work in occupational health is not a small thing to celebrate."

SASOM itself was founded in 1948. Over the decades since, and without any statutory enactment behind it, the Society developed into a body recognised both locally and internationally as operating at the level of specialist occupational medicine. This standing was built gradually and through professional practice rather than legislation, in parallel with the separate professional identities that emerged for the other occupational health disciplines in South Africa.

The speciality's own route to recognition was a long one. Occupational medicine was accredited by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) in the mid-1990s as a sub-speciality of community health and public health medicine, and was recognised as a medical speciality in its own right in 2005.

As a voluntary society open to all who work in the field, SASOM is able to convene a national network of the more than 60 medical practitioners currently registered at specialist or specialist-equivalent level in occupational medicine. This bespoke network is a standing resource of peer reviewers and academic expertise, available to guide general practitioners and other health professionals in the principles of occupational medicine.

For more than a decade, SASOM has written public and community involvement into its aims as a medical society working at the occupational medicine specialist level. Its governance rests on ethics, transparency, and rigour in the service of public occupational health. Because the aims and objectives of occupational health, including those of the medical speciality of occupational medicine, belong to the public domain, the Society describes its field as 'public occupational medicine'.

The free webinar is accredited for four continuing professional development (CPD) points with the South African Medical Association (SAMA). The registration link and webinar programme are available at: https://sasom.org/events/webinar-70-years-2026

SASOM Chapter activities

The SASOM Western Cape Chapter hosted two free CPD-accredited online meetings on 23 June and 11 August 2026, respectively:

- 'Update on regulations: noise exposure and physical agents', presented by Jaco van Rensburg, a certified occupational hygienist registered with the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH)
- 'Deep dive into asbestos-related lung disease', with three presentations by occupational medicine specialists and registrars from the University of Cape Town, followed by a question-and-answer session: i) Dr Kagiso Peter – 'An overview of asbestos-related lung disease: an OMP's approach', ii) Dr Luqmaan Mohamed – 'Asbestos-related lung disease: case studies', and iii) Dr Itumeleng Ntatamala – 'Palliative care in occupational health: mesothelioma and lung cancer'.

NEWS FROM THE GLOBAL OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ARENA

Celebrating 120 years of ICOH

Image: Courtesy of ICOH

This year marks the 120th anniversary of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH), founded on 13 June 1906 in Milan, Italy, at the First International Congress on Occupational Diseases, held from 9 to 14 June 1906.

At the conclusion of the Congress, ICOH was established as the *Commission Internationale Permanente pour l'Étude des Maladies du Travail* (Permanent International Commission for the Study of Occupational Diseases). The Italian hygienist and physician, Malachia de Cristoforis, convenor of the First International Congress on Occupational Diseases, became the founder and first President of the Commission.

The establishment of the Commission provided a mechanism to translate the outcomes of that pioneering Congress into sustained action, giving continuity and further impetus to an international forum for scientific exchange, professional collaboration, and the advancement of occupational health.

Over the past 120 years, ICOH has evolved into the world's largest international professional and scientific organisation dedicated to occupational health, bringing together approximately 2 000 members from more than 110 countries. Its enduring mission is to promote the protection and health of workers through research, information sharing, education, training, and the advancement of good practices in occupational health worldwide.

While much has changed since 1906, the fundamental purpose remains remarkably relevant. The contemporary statistics serve as a powerful reminder that ICOH's ultimate measure of success is the health, safety, and wellbeing of the people who work. The challenges facing workers continue to evolve from traditional occupational hazards to emerging risks associated with technological change, climate change, new forms of work, and persistent inequalities in access to occupational health services.

As an affiliate member of ICOH, and the only one in Africa, SASOM is honoured to celebrate this important milestone in the history of global occupational health. SASOM is proud of its association with ICOH and of the opportunity to contribute to its continuing work to advance the health, safety, and wellbeing of workers in South Africa, across Africa, and internationally. SASOM extends its heartfelt congratulations to ICOH on 120 years of service, achievement, and commitment. We wish ICOH continued success, renewed energy, and meaningful impact in the years ahead, and look forward to working together to ensure that the next 120 years bring us closer to a world where every worker has the opportunity to work in conditions that protect their health, dignity, and wellbeing.

To mark this significant anniversary, ICOH invited current and former leaders, members, and representatives of partner organisations to share brief reflections, memories, and messages for the future. Together, these contributions celebrate ICOH's rich heritage, while highlighting a shared and continuing commitment to healthier, safer workplaces, and advancing occupational health for workers worldwide. The celebratory videoclip is available at: https://www.icohweb.org/site/news-detail.asp?id=1297

One hundred and twenty years of occupational health, 120 years of international collaboration, and a continuing commitment to making a difference that matters in the lives of workers, their families, and their communities.

ICOH elections for the 2027–2030 triennium

ICOH has announced the candidates for election as Officers and Board members for the 2027–2030 triennium. Candidates must meet the eligibility requirements set out in the ICOH Constitution and by-laws. Officers and Board members are elected for the period between General Assemblies and the triennial international congresses, with the possibility of re-election for one additional term, subject to the applicable provisions. The newly elected Officers will assume office at the General Assembly held immediately after the ICOH2027 Congress in Mumbai in February 2027. Members may stand for only one elected position at a time. The deadline

for submitting candidatures was 14 May 2026. The elections will be conducted electronically, and eligible voting members (ICOH members in good standing, as of February 2026 – one year before the ICOH2027 Congress) will receive information and instructions regarding the voting process, which will take place in electronic format from 1–21 October 2026. The list of candidates and their short biographies is available on the ICOH website under 'News' (https://www.icohweb.org/site/election-tenure-2027-2030.asp) and in the most recently published *ICOH Newsletter*.

ICOH at the 114th Session of the International Labour Conference

ICOH was represented by its President, Prof. Seong-Kyu Kang, at the 114th Session of the International Labour Conference, held in Geneva from 1–12 June 2026. In his address to the Conference, Prof. Kang highlighted the importance of ensuring that the International Labour Organization (ILO) List of Occupational Diseases remains responsive to the changing world of work. He emphasised that keeping the List up to date is essential for strengthening the prevention, recognition, and reporting of occupational diseases, while supporting greater justice and protection for workers.

His contribution, titled 'Updating the ILO List of Occupational Diseases: A necessary step for prevention, recognition, and justice', reinforced the important role of international collaboration in ensuring that occupational health frameworks keep pace with emerging risks and changing patterns of work.

ICOH Newsletter

The most recent issue of the *ICOH Newsletter* (volume 24, number 2, August 2026) is available on the ICOH website (https://www.icohweb.org/site/pdf-viewer/viewer.asp?newsletter=icoh_newsletter_vol24_no2.pdf).

WHWB webinar on disabilities and mental health in the workplace

Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB) hosted a timely webinar on 13 August 2026, featuring Dr Sefakor Komabu-Pomeyie, who presented 'Embracing and owning mental health as an invisible disability in our workplaces'. Dr Komabu-Pomeyie, Director of Intercultural Excellence at the University of Vermont's College of Nursing and Health Sciences, is a lecturer, author, policy analyst, and advocate, working at the intersection of workplace health, disability inclusion, and occupational safety. She is also the founder of Enlightening and Empowering People with Disabilities in Africa (EEPD Africa), which promotes the rights, inclusion, and wellbeing of people with disabilities across Africa.

The webinar explored the often-overlooked relationship between disability, workplace hazards, and mental health, highlighting the importance of awareness, early recognition, and inclusive occupational health practices. Participants gained practical insights into disability, mental health, and stigma, recognising early signs of mental health challenges in the workplace, and applying the five-step Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Action Plan.

The session reflected WHWB's commitment to promoting health equity, inclusion, and safer, healthier workplaces for all workers, including those living with disabilities. The recording of the webinar is available on WHWB's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aIG2GS9iOc

Global Occupational Safety and Health (GOSH) Coalition: progress on the 'Call to Action'

A recent initiative by the GOSH Coalition was to submit a letter addressed to the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and the delegates of the 79th World Health Assembly, calling for the prioritisation of worker health in the WHO's future strategy and plans. GOSH is aware that the position of WHO Director-General will soon become vacant. The selection of a new director-general will involve a rigorous and semi-public process, presenting another timely opportunity to advocate for occupational health to be recognised as a priority in the WHO's future agenda. To support this advocacy, GOSH has prepared a new communication to be sent to prospective candidates as they formally announce their candidacy. Four candidates have announced their candidacy to date, from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Belgium (https://www.who.int/about/governance/election-of-the-who-director-general/candidates)

SASOM and its sister organisation, SAIOH, are members of the GOSH Coalition and endorsed both letters as supporting organisations.

Postponement of the First International Conference on Informal Work: Health, Safety, and Wellbeing

The First International Conference on Informal Work, originally scheduled to take place in Santiago de Cali, Colombia, in November 2026, has been postponed to 2027 (dates to be

confirmed) following a major earthquake that struck the city and surrounding areas on 10 August 2026.

The earthquake caused significant damage to infrastructure, university facilities, transportation networks, and hospitality services. With the region still engaged in emergency responses and recovery, the local organising committee at *Universidad del Valle* determined that it would not be possible to guarantee the safety, mobility, and logistical support required to host an international conference of this scale in November.

Despite the postponement, preparations for the Conference have progressed well. A first draft of the programme and agenda have been completed, and more than 40 scientific abstracts have already been received for oral and poster presentations from researchers around the world. *Universidad del Valle* has reaffirmed its commitment to hosting and leading the local organisation of the Conference in 2027. The Conference will continue to build momentum towards 2027, with the new dates to be agreed upon jointly by the co-organising institutions, viz. *Universidad del Valle*, Colombia, the Global Coalition on Informal Workers' Health, Safety and Wellbeing (GCIW), the International Ergonomics Association (IEA), the ICOH Scientific Committee on Occupational Health in Small-Scale Enterprises and the Informal Sector (SC OHSSEIS), and the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA).

SASOM and GCIW stand firmly alongside our Colombian colleagues during this challenging period. We look forward to continuing our collaboration, maintaining the momentum towards the Conference, and ultimately coming together in Colombia in 2027 to strengthen global action for healthier, safer, and more equitable work in the informal economy. Our thoughts and solidarity are with our colleagues, their families, workplaces, and communities in Colombia as they navigate the recovery process.

Despite the temporary challenges following the recent earthquake, Cali's resilience and unique spirit remain strong. We look forward to returning in 2027 to reconnect, collaborate, and experience all that this remarkable city has to offer.

Santiago de Cali, Colombia – a vibrant city of salsa, culture, and warm hospitality
Photograph: https://colombia-travels.com/