

SASOM international liaison report on OCCUCON 2020: Mumbai, India, 28 January–1 February 2020

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The International Conclave on Occupational Health 2020 (OCCUCON 2020) and associated conferences were held in Mumbai, India from 28 January to 1 February 2020, with the overall theme *Healthy Worker: Key to Productivity and Sustainability*. More than 200 delegates participated, representing 25 countries across six continents. The venue was the Nehru Centre, a memorial to Jawaharlal Nehru, an Indian independence activist and, subsequently, the first prime minister of India. The Centre aims to promote the teachings and ideals of Nehru through educational and cultural programmes and has hosted many scientific, cultural and educational activities since its official launch in 1972.

MUMBAI, 'THE CITY OF DREAMS'

The city of Mumbai, previously known as Bombay, is a veritable melting pot of ethnicities, cultures, religions and backgrounds, making it one of the most vibrant cities in the world, and the fourth most populous (close to 22 million in 2020). The most densely populated city in India, it is the capital of the state of Maharashtra and is fast becoming a developed and industrialised hub, with a booming tourism industry and bustling businesses, in contrast to the more traditional activities and occupations of yesteryear, in agriculture and fishing. It is also home to some of India's premier scientific and nuclear institutes. Mumbai is well known for the stark contrast between the rich and poor; while there are several slums, the city also houses the highest number of billionaires and millionaires in the country, making it India's wealthiest city.

The state of Maharashtra is famous for its caves and rock-cut architecture, as in Ajanta Ellora Caves, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage site. Some of the temples in Maharashtra are more than 1 000 years old. The city itself is home to three of the most popular UNESCO world heritage sites – the Elephanta Caves on Elephanta Island, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (or the Victoria Terminus), and the Victorian and Art Deco ensemble of buildings.

The city dwellers, known as 'Mumbaikars', lead a fast-paced life and spend much of their time commuting from place to place, in this bustling and vast metropolis. They are hard-working, passionate and approachable people who move with the times, and are leaving behind the more traditional and entrenched lifestyles dictated by caste, creed and colour.

The culture of this dynamic city is a boisterous blend of cuisines, languages (mainly Marathi, followed by Hindi, Gujarati, English, and other dialects), food, arts and crafts, cinema (the city is the home of the 'Bollywood' film industry) and festivals. The 'Mumbaikars' are zealous about fine arts and the theatre, embracing many different styles of music and folk dancing (e.g. Koli, Powada, Banjara Holi and Lavani). There is a diversity of religions in Mumbai due to the widespread growth of various communities and migrants; the 'Mumbaikars' are mostly a concentrated mix of Hindus, Muslims, Zoroastrians, Christians, Jains and Buddhists.

A city of many contrasts and a few 'firsts' – first train, first public bus service, first airport and first five-star hotel in India – Mumbai



The Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, formerly known as Victoria Terminus, is the headquarters of the Central Railway and a UNESCO world heritage site

Source: pixabay.com, image by Sushil Sam



OCCUCON 2020 was held at the Nehru Centre in Mumbai and was attended by more than 200 delegates, representing 25 countries across six continents

Photographs: Courtesy of IAOH and OCCUCON 2020 organisers



can be said to be the financial (stock market centres and the Reserve Bank of India), commercial (global reach) and entertainment (Bollywood) capital of India. A visit to this 'City of Dreams', be it for business, leisure or both, is bound to be a colourful, unforgettable experience, and an assault on the senses, in every respect!

THE INTERNATIONAL CONCLAVE ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH 2020

OCCUCON 2020 was divided into two events, viz. 1) the Scientific Programme of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH), and 2) the 70th National Conference of the Indian Association of Occupational Health (IAOH, an affiliate member of ICOH) held jointly with the 68th Annual Conference of IAOH – Mumbai branch. South Africa was represented in the form of presenters and delegates who are members of the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM, an affiliate member of ICOH) and two of its sister organisations, viz. the South African Society of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN) and the Mine Medical Professionals Association (MMPA).

28 TO 30 JANUARY 2020

The first event was the ICOH Scientific Programme, with the theme *Keys to Sustainable Occupational Safety and Health (OSH): Evidence, Practice and Collaboration*. In an historical first for ICOH, the following eight ICOH Scientific Committees (SCs) collaborated to organise and host a joint conference as part of OCCUCON 2020, in close partnership with the IAOH: Effectiveness in Occupational Health Services; Education and Training in Occupational Health; Rural Health: Agriculture, Pesticides and Organic Dusts; Mining Occupational Safety and Health; Occupational Health in the Construction Industry; Occupational Health and Development; Occupational Health in Small-Scale Enterprises and the Informal Sector; and Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry (MEDICHEM). The ICOH Scientific Programme comprised keynote plenaries, parallel oral sessions, special sessions, poster sessions, workshops, round tables, interactive expert panels and business meetings organised by the eight ICOH SCs and IAOH, both as individual SC tracks and as joint collaborative sessions between two or more SCs. Keynote plenaries were delivered on the following topics:

- Evidence-based guidelines in OSH: What can we share? – Prof. Carel Hulshof (the Netherlands)
- Sustainable development for occupational health professionals: The chemical sector view – Dr Murray Coombs (South Africa), chair of the ICOH SC on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry (MEDICHEM) and SASOM member
- Keys to agricultural workers' health: Some challenges ahead – Prof. Gert van der Laan (the Netherlands)
- Global and local health effects of mercury exposure in artisanal and small-scale gold mining – Dr Erik Jørs (Denmark), Chair of the ICOH SC on Mining Occupational Safety and Health
- Vision Zero: The global future to prevent accidents and diseases at work – Prof. Karl-Heinz Noetel (Germany)
- How to measure the quality and effectiveness of our education: Theory versus practice – Prof. Lutgart Braeckman (Belgium)
- Integrating basic occupational health services into primary care – Dr Garth Manning (CEO of the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA), based in Thailand)



Inaugural function and awards evening – L to R: Dr Ashish Mishra (president of the AIOH Mumbai branch and current ICOH national secretary for India), Dr Shrinivas Shanbhag (Conference chair and past ICOH Board member), Prof. Seong-Kyu Kang (ICOH vice president for National Secretaries and guest of honour at OCCUCON 2020), Ms Claudina Nogueira (SASOM ExCo member and ICOH vice president for Scientific Committees), Dr Ramnik Parekh (OCCUCON 2020 'chief guest' and patron), Dr Sidram Raut (national president of IAOH), and Dr Hitesh Shingala (general secretary of IAOH)

Photograph: Courtesy of IAOH and OCCUCON 2020 organisers

- Experiences on OSH of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and informal economy workplaces – Dr Tsuyoshi Kawakami (senior specialist in OSH and Labour Inspection in the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team in New Delhi, India)
- Interventions for betterment of health and safety in SMEs and the informal sector – Prof. Somnath Gangopadhyay (India), secretary of the ICOH SC on Occupational Health in Small-Scale Enterprises and the Informal Sector
- Occupational health through primary or community care: Leading to universal occupational health care (India) – Dr Ramnik Parekh (India), 'chief guest' and patron of OCCUCON 2020, fellow of WONCA, and recipient of Lifetime Achievement Awards from four OSH societies in India, among many other achievements and honours
- Efforts in increasing coverage of occupational health services to the workers community in Indonesia – Dr Astrid Sulistomo (Indonesia)
- Basic occupational health services in Thailand: Current perspectives and future challenges – Dr Somkiat Siriruttanapruk (Thailand)
- The *Sir Ardeshir Dalal Memorial Oration* titled 'Health and wellbeing @ workplace: Key to business growth' was presented by Dr R Rajesh, immediate past president of IAOH and past ICOH national secretary for India

Special sessions, expert panel discussions and round tables covered the following topics:

- Scientific evaluation of education
- Alternative for mercury in small-scale gold mining
- Prevention of silicosis and tuberculosis – with a contribution from South Africa by Dr Khanyile Baloyi (Minerals Council South Africa and MMPA member) who presented 'Prevention of tuberculosis in mining: Practical experiences from South Africa'
- Basic occupational health services – with contributions from South Africa by Dr Muzimkhulu Zungu from the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) and the University of Pretoria (UP) who presented 'Health reforms in South Africa: Are occupational health services going to improve?', and expert panel member Ms Claudina Nogueira (UP, SASOM ExCo member, and ICOH vice president for SCs)

- Educating future OSH professionals and managers and workers in OSH – with a contribution from South Africa by Ms Angie Butkovic (University of the Witwatersrand and SASOHN member) who presented 'Assembling an inter-professional core curriculum for occupational health practitioners'

The sessions of the ICOH SC on Rural Health were dedicated to global warming and climate change, and a badge inscribed 'Stop Global Warming' was handed to delegates who attended these sessions, as a goodwill token. The chair of the ICOH SC on Rural Health, Dr Sashikala Chandrasekar (India), kicked off the first SC session on 29 February with an overview presentation on the causes and impacts of global warming and climate change. Ms Claudina Nogueira (South Africa), ICOH vice president for SCs and SASOM ExCo member, was invited to contribute to the programme, and delivered the second presentation titled 'The myriad faces of climate change: Lessons for occupational and public health', which focused on impacts on health and the environment, some examples from developing countries, and suggestions for preventive measures that can be applied to reduce the effects of global warming. A short video on the effects of global warming was screened between the first and second presentations of this session, to create awareness about this hot topic. The screening was appreciated by the delegates, even though it delivered a sombre 'take-home' message and sounded many alarm bells in the room. In the second part of this session, members from the SC presented on their topics of expertise and interest, as indicated below:

- Dr Erik Jørs (Denmark), chair of the ICOH SC on Mining Occupational Safety and Health, presented examples on how and why local small-scale OSH interventions in agriculture can suddenly have national impact
- Dr Mahinda Seneviratne (Australia), chair of the ICOH SC on Small-Scale Enterprises and the Informal Sector, presented on health hazard communication
- Prof. Pierluigi Cocco (Italy) presented on lymphoma risk following exposure to organic dusts in agricultural occupations
- Prof. Susan Brumby (Australia) delivered a presentation titled 'I didn't think it mattered – Needlestick incidents in the livestock sectors in Victoria, Australia'
- Dr Praveen Vemula (India) presented on prophylactic technologies to prevent pesticide-induced toxicity and mortality
- Dr Sara Arphorn (Thailand) delivered a presentation titled 'Farmer's health: Working conditions and behaviour'

The following workshops were offered:

- Chemical exposure: From environment to epidemiology (MEDICHEM)
- Basic occupational hygiene for small enterprises
- Wikipedia for OSH engagement and impact



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Photograph: Dr Sashikala Chandrasekar

- How to find online information on OSH efficiently and effectively
- Ergonomic assessment of construction tasks
- Core values at work
- Orientation to occupational health: Current and future challenges (workshop for safety and engineering professionals)
- IAOH Mumbai branch workshop

29 JANUARY TO 1 FEBRUARY 2020

The second event was the 70th National Conference of the IAOH held jointly with the 68th Annual Conference of the IAOH Mumbai branch, with the same overall theme *Healthy Worker: Key to Productivity and Sustainability*. The inaugural function was held on the evening of 29 January, and included entertainment of traditional music by an ensemble of medical doctors with different specialties from across India, who demonstrated their musical abilities. This vibrant offering was followed by the presentation of the IAOH annual awards (national association and branches) and the inaugural dinner. The first plenary session on 30 January was common to both events. The following orations were presented in plenary sessions over the remaining two days:

- The *Dr KM Bhansali Oration* titled 'Radiation and Health' was presented by Dr Hemant Haldavnekar, past president of the IAOH Mumbai branch
- The *Dr CK Ramchander Memorial Oration* titled 'Vision Zero for zero harm in working women' was presented by Dr Sashikala Chandrasekar, chair of the ICOH SC on Rural Health
- The *OHSF-IAOH Mumbai Branch Oration* titled 'Capacity building in occupational health: Challenges and opportunities in India' was presented by Dr Shyam Pingle, ICOH Board member and past president of IAOH
- The *Dr JC Kothari Memorial Oration* titled 'Mental stress: Its impact on non-communicable diseases and performance in the workplace' was presented by Dr S Shivaramakrishnan, past president and general secretary of IAOH and past ICOH national secretary for India
- The *Worksafe India Oration* titled 'Update on occupational health in South Africa' was presented by Ms Claudina Nogueira, SASOM ExCo member and ICOH vice president for SCs

Other topics of interest that were covered in semi-plenary sessions included:

- International perspectives on occupational health, presented by Prof. Seong-Kyu Kang (Republic of Korea, ICOH vice president for National Secretaries and guest of honour at OCCUCON 2020) and Prof. Malcolm Sim (Australia, president of the ICOH2021 (now ICOH2022) Congress in Melbourne)
- Case studies on best practices in occupational health
- Chemical burns: International review and recommendations for management
- Use of technology towards cervical cancer elimination
- Artificial intelligence-enabled preventive healthcare
- Combating fatigue and tiredness in the workplace
- Intersection of industrial hygiene, and occupational health and medicine
- Role of occupational health in driving inclusion and diversity
- Mental wellbeing in the workplace
- Technology in occupational health
- Integrated occupational health services across oil refineries in India
- Epidemiology in India: Opportunity of utilisation in occupational health

- The labour code and occupational health
- Clinical tools for workplace ergonomics
- Adult immunisation and release of guidelines developed by IAOH and leading experts in India

The hosts and organisers of OCCUCON 2020 and associated conferences are to be congratulated for a very successful and well attended event that was efficiently run. The scientific content of the presentations across the five days was of a very high standard, and the conclave offered all participants who represented various stakeholders the ideal opportunity to network and update their knowledge in various aspects of occupational health. Selected abstracts from both events have been published as OCCUCON 2020 proceedings in a special issue of the *Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (IJOEM)*, the official publication of IAOH (Vol. 24, Supplement 4, January 2020).

A special word of thanks and appreciation is extended to all members of the various conference committees who made OCCUCON 2020 possible and successful, and, in particular, to the following 'movers and shakers': Dr Sidram K Raut (national president of IAOH); Dr Ramnik Parekh (OCCUCON 2020 'chief guest' and patron); Dr Shrinivas M Shanbhag (conference chair and past ICOH board member); the organising secretaries, Dr Ashish Mishra (president of the AIOH Mumbai branch and current ICOH national secretary for India) and Dr Nikunj Desai (secretary of the AIOH Mumbai branch); Dr S Shivaramakrishnan (conference director, logistics and resource); Dr Thirumalai Rajgopal (chair of the Scientific Committee) and his team of magicians – Dr Suvarna Moti (ICOH scientific convenor), Dr Damodhar Lele (OCCUCON scientific convenor), Dr Shyam Pingle (conference international collaboration advisor and current ICOH board member), and Dr (Maj.) Bishwadeep Paul (conference international collaboration coordinator and current vice president of IAOH); and the leadership of the eight ICOH SCs (chairs and secretaries).

To quote Dr Thirumalai Rajgopal from his editorial in the special issue of the IJOEM, "Good health is indeed good business! Apart from being the profitable thing to do, improving employee health is quite the right and responsible thing to do. OCCUCON 2020 looks set to be a catalyst in strengthening occupational health in the country".

A special word of thanks is extended to IAOH and the OCCUCON 2020 organisers for permission to publish photographs of the event and the use of the IAOH logo.

NEWS FROM THE SASOM NATIONAL OFFICE

The SASOM national office in Pretoria has relocated to new premises in Montana, after being based in Meyerspark for many years. The new contact details are as follows:

- Physical address: Plot 59, Dr van der Merwe Avenue, Montana, Pretoria (new)
- Postal address: PO Box 32, Silverton, 0127 (unchanged)
- Telephone number: +27 (0) 87 288 0893 (new)

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus, resulting in the current COVID-19 global pandemic, has placed additional responsibilities on all who are involved in health services, in general. During these unprecedented and challenging times, the prominence of SASOM has come to the fore, through the escalation in workload by continuously keeping its members abreast of

relevant information pertaining to COVID-19, as well as liaison with national and international stakeholders such as the Department of Employment and Labour's 'Occupational Health Forum', the *Occupational Health Southern Africa* (OHSa) journal, ICOH, and the International Occupational Medicine Society Collaborative (IOMSC). The role of the ICOH national secretary for South Africa, executed through the SASOM national office, has also increased substantially because of COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was recently signed between SASOM and the Compensation Fund, paving the way for future collaboration between the two institutions in terms of research, teaching and raising their individual profiles.

A second MoU was signed between SASOM and MEDICHEM for secretarial services and support to MEDICHEM through the SASOM national office. Activities under this agreement commenced with effect from 11 March 2020.

The webinars presented by the National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH) have been well received and found to be invaluable for SASOM members in terms of ongoing updates on various aspects pertaining to the pandemic.

The OHSa journal has been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the editorial board was forced to fast track the move of the journal to an electronic platform. SASOM played a pivotal role in engaging all parties to find an amicable solution to ensure the sustainability of the journal during these uncertain times and into the future. SASOM contributed greatly to the process of digitalising the OHSa journal in so far as conceptualising access control is concerned, for members of the occupational health societies. SASOM will, in future, also host the meetings of the editorial board of the journal on its Zoom platform, free of charge.

The aforementioned developments have reiterated the prominent role that SASOM is playing as the leading authority in maintaining good cooperation between societies and other stakeholders in occupational health and medicine in South Africa.

As mentioned in the previous issue of the journal, the SASOM Annual Congress, which was scheduled to take place in Pretoria from 31 July to 1 August 2020, has been postponed indefinitely. Details about the possibility of hosting a one-day conference, followed by the annual general meeting in Pretoria at the end of this year, will be communicated to all members once there is more clarity on the pandemic situation.

In light of the inevitable suspension of face-to-face events for professional development, SASOM has started offering virtual training opportunities to its members. The main objective of the virtual training/education sessions is to enhance medical and clinical decision-making skills for occupational medicine practitioners (OMPs) to better manage COVID-19-infected employees with chronic comorbidities. Clinical decision-making skills, in terms of comorbidities related to the respiratory, cardiovascular, and metabolic systems, were identified by SASOM members as hot topics for the virtual training.

The first free Zoom webinar was hosted by SASOM on 14 July 2020 on the topic 'Standardisation of spirometry: 2020 update'. Eighty-seven members registered for this session, which was presented by Ms Lindsay Zurba, director and training manager at Education for Health Africa.

SASOM webinars are accredited by the South African Medical Association (SAMA) for Continuing Professional Development (CPD points/CEUnits) for all participants. Biweekly virtual training sessions are planned for the remainder of 2020; details will be communicated to members as they become available.