REPORT ON THE SASOM-MEDICHEM JOINT CONGRESS, 31 July to 3 August 2019

The first Joint Congress of the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM) and the International Scientific Association for Occupational and Environmental Health in the Production and Use of Chemicals (MEDICHEM) was held at the Protea Hotel by Marriott Kempton Park, Gauteng, South Africa. SASOM is an affiliate member of the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) and MEDICHEM acts as the ICOH Scientific Committee (SC) on Occupational Health in the Chemical Industry.

The theme of the Congress was ‘Control of Substances Hazardous to Health: Old and Emerging Issues’. Attendees were accredited with 26 CEUnits for full attendance, including two ethics points (South African Medical Association (SAMA) or four CEUnits (South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP)).

In a true reflection of global collaboration in occupational health, approximately 110 participants (including invited speakers, delegates and exhibitors) attended the Congress, representing 25 countries: Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Kenya, India, Israel, Italy, Kuwait, Lesotho, Malaysia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Rwanda, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States, Zimbabwe, and South Africa.

The Congress was officially opened by Prof Daan Kocks (Chair: SASOM) and Dr Murray Coombs (President: MEDICHEM). A special welcome was extended to the Office Bearers, National Secretaries and representatives of the SCs of ICOH. SASOM and MEDICHEM collaborated in this first joint venture to bring together international professional networks to share their expertise. The chemical industry expertise was represented through MEDICHEM and the International Council for Chemical Associations, most notably for their work in sustainable development, green chemistry and responsible care. Opportunities were created for the local professional occupational health societies, viz. SASOM, the South African Society for Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners (SASOHN), and the Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH), to interact and network with the international participants. This platform also allowed for excellent opportunities for workplace practitioners and industry representatives to meet with academic and government institutions.

The stimulating and informative scientific programme included alternating MEDICHEM and SASOM sessions, with the following sub-themes: (i) Setting the Scene: Chemical Exposure Perspectives - Global, Regional, In-Country; (ii) Chemical Hazards: Occupational Health Ethics and Emerging Issues; (iii) Chemical Hazards: Role of Professional Networks in Occupational Health and; (iv) Health and Chemicals: Learnings and Applications. Six ICOH SCs, which have overlapping work and research interests with those of both MEDICHEM and SASOM, accepted invitations from the
Congress organisers to be officially represented in the scientific programme, viz. SC on History of the Prevention of Occupational and Environmental Diseases; SC on Mining Occupational Safety and Health (SC MinOSH); SC on Occupational Health Nursing (SC OHN); SC on Occupational and Environmental Dermatoses (SC OED); SC on Occupational Toxicology (SC OT); and SC on Industrial Hygiene (SC IH).

The Congress presentations covered a wide spectrum of topics, as detailed in the comprehensive report available on the *Occupational Health Southern Africa* website. Also available on the journal website are the abstracts of all presentations and specific citations from learnings shared in the seven keynote and 35 oral presentations, which are worthy ‘take home messages’ for all participants.

**MEDICHEM awards**
The Joint Congress organisers, scientific committee members and panel of adjudicators take this opportunity to congratulate the winners of the MEDICHEM Awards.

- **Winner:** Young Professionals Programme (YPP) Award - Dr Botembetume Maboso (Mafeteng, Lesotho), for his presentation, ‘Assessing the burden of silicosis, TB and HIV among Basotho formerly employed in South African mines’
- **Winner:** MEDICHEM Prize - Ms Annelize Jacobs (Port Elizabeth, South Africa), for her presentation, ‘World class occupational health in an emerging market environment’
- **Runner-up:** MEDICHEM Prize - Dr Itumeleng Ntatamala (Cape Town, South Africa), for his presentation, ‘Hard metal lung disease: Old and emerging issues’

**Associated events and social function**
MEDICHEM held a half-day pre-Congress workshop, titled ‘Chemicals: from Environment to Epidemiology’ with 12 participants and two international facilitators: Dr Tee Guidotti (USA/Canada), a consultant in occupational and environmental health and medicine, in private practice (post-retirement); and Dr Avi Wiener (Israel), an occupational medicine practitioner from the Israel Institute of Technology (Technion) in Haifa and the Institute of Occupational Medicine, Sheba Medical Centre, Ramat-Gan. Topics were: introduction to environmental toxicology, toxico-dynamics, carcinogenesis, application of toxicology and epidemiology in the modern work environment, and case studies.

The ICOH Officers Meeting was attended by the ICOH President Dr Jukka Takala (Finland), the Secretary General Prof Sergio Iavicoli (Italy), the two Vice Presidents, Prof Seong-Kyu Kang (Republic of Korea) and Ms Claudina Nogueira (South Africa), and two members of the ICOH Secretariat staff (Italy), Mr Pierluca Dionisi and Mr Antonio Valenti.
The ICOH Regional (African) National Secretaries Meeting was facilitated by Prof Seong-Kyu Kang (ICOH Vice President for National Secretaries) and attended by the ICOH National Secretaries for Kenya (Dr Kibor Keitany), Nigeria (Dr Uche Enumah), South Africa (Prof Daan Kocks), and Zimbabwe (Dr Blessing Garamumhango); the ICOH National Secretaries for Mali (Dr Birama Diallo) and Togo (Dr Silvere Kevi) attended remotely via Skype.

The official social function was the Gala Dinner. The evening was a traditional ‘outdoor-indoor’ South African style ‘braai’ with a ‘shebeen’ theme, complete with ‘konka’ fires, fairy lights and musical entertainment. ‘Shebeens’ were the name given to illegally operated taverns, mostly in black townships, selling home-brewed alcohol. They also functioned as meeting places for activists of the struggle against apartheid. The sumptuous banquet of typically South African nosh was complemented by an animated and high-energy performance by the drumming outfit, ‘Drum Sound Circles’, after which the guests threw caution to the wind, let their hair down and danced the night away to the tunes provided by a disc jockey who played both local and international music, with many ‘blast from the past’ renditions.

**Closure and acknowledgements**

The Congress’ main task - ‘to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’ - was accomplished. The outcome of the Congress was well aligned with the recent political declaration at the General Assembly of the United Nations for ‘Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier World’ and with the International Labour Organization (ILO) message: ‘We recognise that our efforts to achieve our mission must fit into broader societal and global actions to improve working conditions in all parts of the world. Our common efforts can play an important role to convince and support all governments and employers to invest in responsible labour practices, to achieve our mission; we must use and share our combined knowledge and expertise’; and, more specifically, the ICOH and ILO supported call to action – ‘to recognise the fundamental rights of safety and health not only to achieve improved health and safety, but also as support to the Sustainable Development Goals, to call on governments and policymakers to address the links between decent work, occupational hazards and diseases, and implement such rights into decisions and commit to implement such actions’.

The Congress organisers thank the following 16 exhibitor companies who supported the event by displaying their services and products; some companies donated prizes for lucky draws during the Congress: Amtronix (Pty) Ltd, eMoyoDotNetza (Pty) Ltd, Foundation for Professional Development (FPD), H.A.S.S. Industrial (Pty) Ltd, Homemed (Pty) Ltd, iMED Distributors, Kendon Medical Supplies TVL (Pty) Ltd, Medical Solutions, National Institute for Occupational Health (NIOH), Novex Pharmaceuticals CC, Occupational Therapy in Occupational Health (OTOH), Prism Inter Africa CC
(Prismia), Rand Mutual Admin Services, Sanofi Pasteur, Sleepfit (Pty) Ltd, SSEM Mthembu Medical (Pty) Ltd.

Last but not least, the success of the Congress relied heavily on the dedication and long hours of hard word by all involved. SASOM and MEDICHEM would like to thank the Congress Organising Committee and other friends and supporters of both organisations who worked tirelessly to plan and organise the Congress, finalise a scientific programme of a high standard, liaise with presenters and delegates alike in terms of logistic arrangements, and be present during the Congress week to assist with all the requirements that an international congress entails.

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Photographs for consideration for the print issue

Photograph 1 – Congress Organisers and ICOH Officers - L to R: Dr Marissa Muller – SASOM member (South Africa); Prof Sergio Iavicoli - ICOH Secretary General (Italy); Dr Murray Coombs - MEDICHEM President (South Africa); Dr Jukka Takala – ICOH President (Finland); Prof Seong-Kyu Kang – ICOH Vice President (Republic of Korea); Prof Daan Kocks – SASOM Chair (South Africa); Ms Claudina Nogueira – ICOH Vice President and SASOM ExCo member (South Africa); Dr André Kotzé - SASOM Vice Chair and MEDICHEM National Representative (South Africa); Dr Adriaan Combrinck - SASOM Treasurer and MEDICHEM member (South Africa); Mr Jaco Botha – SASOM Project Coordinator (South Africa)

Photograph: Laria Botha
Photograph 2 – ICOH Officers and National Secretaries (NSs) – L to R: Dr Uche Enumah - ICOH NS for Nigeria; Prof Daan Kocks - ICOH NS for South Africa; Prof Seong-Kyu Kang – ICOH Vice President for NSs (Republic of Korea); Prof Sergio Iavicoli – ICOH Secretary General (Italy); Ms Claudina Nogueira – ICOH Vice President for Scientific Committees (South Africa); Dr Jukka Takala – ICOH President (Finland); Dr Kibor Keitany – ICOH NS for Kenya

Photograph: Laria Botha
Photograph 3 – African diaspora representation at the Congress – L to R: Dr Paloma Maripiha - occupational medicine registrar at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Mozambique); Dr Custódio Muianga – occupational hygienist and environmental health scientist (Mozambique / USA); Mr Peter-John ‘Jakes’ Jacobs – occupational hygienist, President of the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA) 2018-2019 and Southern African Institute for Occupational Hygiene (SAIOH) Council member (South Africa); Prof Janvier Gasana – Associate Professor, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, Kuwait University (Rwanda / Kuwait); Ms Paulina Mutolo and Ms Flávia Saide – inspectors from the Ministry of Labour, Work and Social Security (Mozambique)

Photograph: Laria Botha
Photograph 4 – Congratulations to the winners – L to R: Seated – MEDICHEM Award winners - Dr Botembetume Maboso (Lesotho), winner of the Young Professionals Programme (YPP) Award; Ms Annelize Jacobs (South Africa), winner of the MEDICHEM Prize; Dr Itumeleng Ntamala (South Africa), runner-up of the MEDICHEM Prize. L to R: Standing – Prof Kenneth Mundt - MEDICHEM Secretary (USA); Prof Daan Kocks - SASOM Chair (South Africa); Dr André Kotzé - SASOM Vice Chair and MEDICHEM National Representative (South Africa); Dr Avi Wiener – MEDICHEM Board member and National Representative (Israel); Ms Claudina Nogueira – ICOH Vice President and SASOM ExCo member (South Africa); Dr Alex Govender - MEDICHEM Board member (South Africa); Dr Tee Guidotti – MEDICHEM Board member (USA / Canada); Dr Adriaan Combrinck - SASOM Treasurer and MEDICHEM member (South Africa); Dr Abed Bin Onn – MEDICHEM Board member and National Representative (Malaysia); Dr Steffen Hitzeroth – MEDICHEM Treasurer (Germany); Dr Murray Coombs – MEDICHEM President (South Africa)

Photograph: Marissa Muller
Photograph 5 – **Artistic licence** – Mr Jaco Botha, Project Coordinator in the SASOM National Office (far right) shares drumming tips with the members of ‘Drum Sound Circles’ who provided the entertainment at the gala dinner

*Photograph: Laria Botha*
Photograph 6 – Standing room only – Drs Custódio Muianga (Mozambique / USA, left) and Abed Bin Onn (Malaysia, right) try their hands at drumming during the gala dinner, egged on by their own cheerleading squad, the members of ‘Drum Sound Circles’

Photograph: Laria Botha
Photograph 7 – Luck of the draw – Dr Angel Ndhllovu, SASOM ExCo member (centre) was one of the lucky winners of the prizes raffled by congress exhibitor Rand Mutual Admin Services, represented by Ms Khutso Mamabolo (left) and Ms Humbulani Mmusi (right)

Photograph: Claudina Nogueira