

Report on the 29th ICOH, International Congress on Occupational Health held in Cape Town from 22 to 27 March 2009



This International Conference takes place once every three years and was held for the first time in Cape Town at the Cape Town ICC. The next conference will be held in Mexico.

The approximately 1400 delegates from all around the world are leaders in occupational health. The delegates included academics and those actively involved with workers in various organisations.

The range of issues discussed, debated, and provision of the latest information ranged from the usual well known diseases of silica exposure to nanotechnology.

The president of the ICOH, Professor Jorma Rantanen, emphasised that occupational health means a workplace that is free of the risks of diseases and accidents, physical, chemical and biological exposures and ergonomic problems. The prerequisites for a healthy worker are healthy work and a healthy workplace. Optimised work organisation and high psychological quality of work requires workers' control over their own work, fair leadership and management practices, opportunities to develop and learn at one's work and a meaningful job content offering challenges and opportunities for personal development. The psychological and psychosocial feature of a healthy workplace is one that is free of unreasonable stress and time pressure and where there is a balance between job demands and control. Good work is one that offers opportunities for social interaction that provides stimuli at work and support from superiors and fellow workers. Modern occupational health research has the potential to make the concept of occupational health become as significant as the lives of the working people.

The current global financial crisis and the resulting job losses were discussed. The emphasis was of work as defining a person and building not only families, but also communities. The current global crisis is resulting in poverty and now more than ever occupational health practitioners can make a difference to the psychosocial well-being of workers. Work is an essential component of a person's life.

The theme was 'Occupational health – a basic right – an asset to society'. The congress grouped the various issues into five sessions including:

- Global perspectives and challenges
- Prevention: a right and asset in the workplace



- Knowledge transfer: rights and assets
- Protecting workers: a challenge to society, and
- Basic rights at work

The plenary sessions in the mornings provided insight and opened the day for discussions around specific topics.

This was a valuable place for researchers to showcase their interest in occupational health and those in occupational health practice to learn, develop new skills and be better able to improve the health of workers to whom they are responsible.

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