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Further information  
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The next issue of e-SOHN will go online in June 2008. Deadline for contributions is 1 May 2008.

## Letter from the Chair

### We're keeping our finger on the pulse

Forum Chair CYNTHIA ATWELL writes on the latest collaborations, conferences and networking.

#### Friends in good places

The year 2007 has been a true challenge. The RCN Society of Occupational Health Nursing (SOHN) continues to represent occupational health nurses (OHNs) in a number of ways. We continue to have regular dialogue and consultation with the Health and Safety Commission (HSC)/ Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), other occupational health and safety professional groups and the Health Work and Well-being (HWWB) National Stakeholders Council.

RCN President Maura Buchanan has attended the stakeholder council meetings, together with RCN Occupational Health Adviser Sharon Horan. The President has admitted that occupational health and the HWWB has been a big learning curve for her, but I am pleased to say that she is now more aware of the impact of work on health and the need for the wider nursing profession to take account of the workplace health needs of their patients.

#### Stakeholder day – a full roster

On 19 November 2007, SOHN, together with the OH Managers Forum (OHMF), organised a 'stakeholder' day at the RCN London. The day's aim was: 'to seek to develop an RCN-led strategy, which would inform the Government and other interested parties of the major contribution the nursing profession does and can make to improving the lives of working age people, working across other nursing and medical disciplines and with other

important stakeholders'.

People from health care and the OH professions were invited to attend, and occupational health and safety was well represented with members from the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS), the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), the National Examination Board for Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH), the Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (FOM). The HSE, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) were also represented. Sadly, few of our nursing colleagues from other specialities attended. However, we did have primary care, public health, mental health and practice nursing represented.

National Director for Work and Health Dame Carol Black and RCN President Maura Buchanan gave presentations to set the scene. Delegates were then placed into working groups to discuss and present solutions to a number of questions posed, regarding the HWWB strategy. The outcome of the day has been presented to Dame Black as part of her review and will form the basis for further consultation through focus groups, to make the perceived solutions a reality.



## ICOH conference not to be missed

**The International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) Scientific Committee on Education and Training will be holding its 8th International Conference in Glasgow, 10–12 April 2008, titled: Healthy working lives for all: crossing the OH multidisciplinary interface.**

Founded in 1906 in Milan as the permanent commission on occupational health, ICOH is a non-governmental organisation that works closely with bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Today, it is the world's leading international scientific society in the field of occupational health, with a membership of 2,000 professionals in 93 countries.

The conference will feature topics such as: training methods; use of technology for teaching; and workplace-based assessments. There will be training modules, including case management, rehabilitation, occupational epidemiology and work-related diseases. For further information about the conference, or ICOH in general, please visit: [www.ichweb.org/events.asp](http://www.ichweb.org/events.asp)

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#### Cardiff conference

In Cardiff in December 2007, we joined with our medical colleagues from the Society of Occupational Medicine to present the annual conference, which was a huge success (see page four). The papers presented were good examples of how the different disciplines involved with occupational health provision have worked together with successful outcomes, for the benefit of the individual, the business, the country and the professions. The main thrust of the presentations was on collaboration and evidence of working together, which means understanding and respecting the role and the positive contribution that each member of the occupational health team has to make to the successful delivery of workplace health care.

#### Working together

We continue to work closely with other nursing groups, including those within public health, primary care and mental health, and we are active in the Federation of OH Nurses in the European Union (FOHNEU). At the FOHNEU Congress in London in September 2007, the Leonardo-funded project 'Harmonising OH nursing in the EU' (HOHNEU) was launched. This is a distance-learning Masters programme,

based on the core curriculum developed by FOHNEU, and is being managed by Sheffield University. Further information on this is available on the website [www.hohneu.eu](http://www.hohneu.eu)

SOHN has continued to have a voice on a number of committees and working groups, including the Professional Organisations in Occupational Safety and Health (POOSH), the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Awards Panel, the Men's Health Forum and GP workshops.

#### Web 'zone' widens

On 28 November 2007, a new section of the 'RCN Learning Zone' was launched at the Department of Work and Pensions by Lord McKenzie. This is a major programme of information on workplace health, which is aimed at general nurses. The aim of this is to improve nurses' knowledge on the effects of work on their patients' health, so that they can begin to consider the wider impact of the care and treatment they provide, as well as further understand their role in supporting patients to return to full activity, including work.

#### Playing the name game ...

Occupational health is still not well understood; we are not getting the message out to our non-occupational health colleagues. Every health care professional has a part to play in

workplace health, and the aim of hospital and community care should be to get the 'patient' back to as full an active life as possible, including work. Perhaps it is time to consider a change of name from 'occupational health' to something with a more obvious meaning, such as 'workplace health' or 'employment health'? However, this needs wider debate.

It is important that we, as OH professionals, make people aware of the importance of work on health; there is a great deal of media publicity about the negative impact of work on individuals. However, recent research has found that 'there is a strong positive association between unemployment and increased rates of overall mortality, mortality from cardiovascular disease, lung cancer and suicide' (Waddell and Burton, 2006).

#### Roll up your shirtsleeves!

OH nurses must take the lead in educating our colleagues and to work with all stakeholders. There has never been a better time to be in occupational health and we must demonstrate our skills as 'specialists' to improve the lives of working people and therefore society and the country as a whole.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and successful 2008.

#### Further reading

Waddell G, Burton AK (2006) *Is work good for your health and well-being?* London: The Stationery Office.



Royal College  
of Nursing

**RCN EVENTS**  
[www.rcn.org.uk/events](http://www.rcn.org.uk/events)

## Renal care across communities

A series of workshops on renal disease and care management

- Cardiff – RCN Wales HQ, (Ty Maeth)**  
Thursday 13 March 2008
- Birmingham – RCN West Midlands Region**  
Thursday 22 May 2008
- Sunderland – RCN Northern Region**  
Thursday 10 July 2008
- Edinburgh – RCN Scotland HQ**  
Thursday 18 September 2008
- London – RCN HQ, London**  
Thursday 30 October 2008
- Belfast – RCN Northern Ireland**  
Thursday 4 December 2008

Workshop  
fee only  
£25!

# New guidance for the workplace

NICE was asked last year by the Department of Health to develop guidance on public health interventions aimed at promoting physical activities in the workplace. Newsletter Editor BASHYR AZIZ reports on what's in store.

**A step in the right direction: encouraging workers to use the stairs**

## NICE background

Formerly known as the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, NICE was set up in 1999 as an independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of disease. In April 2005, the functions of the Health Development Agency were taken over by NICE, since when it has been known as the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, still NICE.

Since its inception, NICE has produced a number of clinical guidelines and it has also established a number of National Collaboration Centres. However, most of the previous guidelines have been targeted at health care organisations such as NHS hospitals and primary care trusts (PCTs).

## Workplace guidance

In May 2008, NICE is expecting to bring out its guidance titled: *Workplace health promotion: how to encourage employees to be physically active*. What is especially important about this guidance is that for it to work NICE will need to have employing organisations sign up to it. With NHS organisations, NICE has been able to take it as given that their guidelines would be implemented

by being turned into directives by NHS Executive. The workplace health promotion guidelines are different in that here, NICE will be looking to directors of companies of all sizes, and at all locations, to work with the Department of Health.

## Benefits to nurses

I believe these guidelines could provide a wonderful opportunity for occupational health nurses (OHNs). OHNs frequently complain about being sidelined by the Government, or that the role of the OHN is not recognised, or that OHNs are not given credit for all the hard work they do. These guidelines will provide OHNs a wonderful opportunity to make their mark in the world of public health and health promotion in the workplace.

I was fortunate enough to attend an implementation planning meeting at NICE, when the proposed guidance was discussed. At the meeting, I made my view clear that, for the guidance to work across the country, and in all sizes of organisations, what NICE needed to do was to enlist the help of OHNs, or to give them their full title – specialist

community public health nurses in occupational health – to become champions for this guidance.

## Putting it into practice

At the time of writing, the guidance has not yet been published, but I would urge all OHNs to keep an eye out for it and be prepared to go up to their managers with the guidance to discuss how OHNs might be able to help implement it. I think that it would also be useful for OHNs to start up a discussion amongst themselves about ideas they have of how physical activity could be encouraged at work. Suggestions I have already seen include the following:

- provide bike sheds, lockers and shower facilities
- at large, sprawling sites, mark out distances in kilometres or steps from one part of the site to another
- provide pedometers and encourage competitiveness – see which individual/team/department walks the longest distance per week
- clearly signpost staircases and put health messages along stairwells to encourage workers to use them rather than lifts.

**For further information about the guidelines, visit:**  
[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=11670](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=11670)

# A meeting of minds

Cardiff City Hall



Newsletter Editor BASHYR AZIZ reports on the 2007 SOHN/SOM Conference held in Cardiff.

When it was decided that the Federation of OH Nurses in the European Union (FOHNEU) Congress would come to the UK in September 2007, the Society of Occupational Health Nursing decided to forego its usual annual exhibition and conference, and instead have a meeting on a smaller scale jointly with the Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM). We were lucky to find Cardiff City Hall for our venue.

## A range of delegates

The conference, held over two days, attracted around 335 delegates, of whom 245 registered as nurses, around 40 were



Dr Gordon Parker, SOM President

physicians, and the remaining 50 or so were listed as 'others', including Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors, company directors, occupational physiotherapists and psychologists, and journalists. The overriding theme of the meeting was collaboration and partnership working, and sessions were chaired and presented equally by members of the two organisations. Entertainment at the meeting dinner on Monday night was provided by a Welsh male choir (see photo).

## What makes us happy?

It is impossible to give a report here that can reflect the great variety of presentations and events at this joint meeting, but here are some of the highlights. The opening morning had Welsh Assembly Chief Nursing Officer Rosemary Kennedy making a passionate plea for occupational nurses to become involved in politics and policy, followed by Professor Mansel Aylward giving a stimulating, humorous, yet thought-provoking lecture on the need to understand the factors that inform happiness, well-being and satisfaction in relation to work. According to him, it could be too facile and complacent to assume that the benefits of work always outweigh the risk of worklessness, and people such as occupational health professionals should take a closer look at the environment and conditions to which their workforce is exposed.

## Shaken not stirred?

On the second day, there was a very interesting, futuristic, presentation from Dr Peter Ellwood, head of the fascinatingly named Horizon Scanning Section at the Health and Safety Laboratory, based in Derbyshire. He transported his audience into the arcane world of 'Q' from the James Bond films, predicting the challenges that science and technology is likely to throw at the world of work over the next decade, and discussed the HSE's scenarios for 2017.

At the time of writing, the delegates' evaluations had not all been received and collated, and so a further report will be included in the next issue of *e-SOHN*, along with information and booking details for this year's conference.



Chilling out



The choir lets it all out

## New SOHN web pages

### Ironing out the bugs

SOHN members will have noticed that the RCN website has not been very easy to access in recent months, and forum pages seem to have disappeared. This is because the RCN is in the process of introducing new, more advanced and user-friendly pages for its members. It is hoped that the new sites will be up and running by mid-March, and SOHN has plans to ensure that its pages take into consideration the needs of occupational health nurses, who frequently work in relative isolation and in all parts of the country.

### SOHN developments

It is proposed that the SOHN site will include pages dedicated to activities of the regional and local groups, and allow such groups to form their own discussion lists and online forums. As the pages develop, the RCN will ensure that all members are kept abreast of changes.

However, for the RCN to be able to provide information to occupational health nurses, it is important that you sign onto SOHN, and also ensure that we have your current email address. Select SOHN as your preferred forum (you are allowed to join three without any additional cost to your RCN subscription), or ensure that you are signed up to 'e-SOHN alert' – this will automatically register your email address with SOHN.

We apologise for the disruption caused during the transition period – we are confident that once the new system is fully operational you will notice a vast improvement in the website, and to SOHN pages in particular.

As ever, if you have any suggestions about how to improve services, then please contact SOHN at email: [bashyr@wlv.ac.uk](mailto:bashyr@wlv.ac.uk)

## A captive audience?

SOHN Committee member GRAHAM JOHNSON reports on National Men's Health Week, 9–15 June 2008.

There is good evidence showing that even though men are reluctant to access mainstream health services, particularly primary care, they will access services provided at work and take part in health improvement initiatives (e.g. weight management).

With such a captive audience, and linking in to the UK government's 'Health, work and wellbeing' strategy, the independent body Men's Health Forum will focus its attention on improving the health of men at work this year.

Men's Health Week will cover traditional health and safety issues (e.g. work-related accidents and ill health, both physical and mental) by increasing men's awareness of these issues and encouraging employers and trade unions to develop a 'gender-sensitive' approach (e.g. literature specifically designed for men).

A significant proportion of men's health problems are work related, e.g. caused by accidents, exposure to hazardous substances and stress. This is also an important inequalities issue, as men in disadvantaged groups are more likely to be affected by work-related health problems.

For further information, visit: [www.menshealthforum.org.uk](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk)