

SASOHN Newsletter

June 2026



SASOHN
SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY
OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
NURSING PRACTITIONERS

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FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT



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Our focus for 2026

Working together to strengthen professional standards, support our members, and promote healthy, safe workplaces across South Africa.

Hello SASOHN members and friends,

From the Desk of the President – SASOHN

As I reflect on the months since February 2026, I am reminded once again of the resilience, professionalism, and deep sense of purpose that define Occupational Health Nursing in South Africa. This year has brought both progress and complexity to our field. Nationally, we have seen encouraging movement toward stronger regulatory alignment, improved integration of psychosocial risk management, and a renewed emphasis on worker wellbeing as a core business imperative. These shifts affirm the essential role Occupational Health Nurses continue to play in shaping healthier, safer workplaces across the country.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the challenges that persist. Illegal practice and practitioners operating outside their scope of practice remain a serious concern, undermining the integrity of our profession and placing both workers and employers at risk.

As SASOHN, we remain committed to advocating for ethical, compliant, and evidence-based practice. I want to personally thank every member who continues to uphold the highest professional standards, even when it requires courage, difficult conversations, or standing firm in environments where shortcuts may be tempting. Your integrity protects lives, strengthens our profession, and preserves the trust placed in Occupational Health Nurses.

Amid these realities, I am proud to share a significant milestone: the SASOHN Position Paper on the Certificate of Fitness has been finalised and formally signed. This achievement reflects months of collaboration, expert input, and thoughtful debate. It provides much-needed clarity and consistency for practitioners and employers alike, and it reinforces the central role of qualified Occupational Health Nurses in the fitness-to-work process.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to everyone who contributed to this important piece of work.

A highlight of our year has

undoubtedly been the SASOHN National Academic Day 2026, held at the stunning Krystal Beach Hotel in Gordon's Bay. The theme, "Occupational Health in South Africa: From Risk Management to Worker Wellbeing", resonated deeply with the current direction of our profession. The energy, engagement, and sense of community were truly inspiring.

To the SASOHN Western Cape Region: thank you for hosting an exceptional Academic Day. Your dedication, attention to detail, and warm hospitality created a memorable and impactful event. You reminded us all of the power of collaboration and the strength of our SASOHN family.

As we look ahead, I remain confident in the collective wisdom, compassion, and professionalism of our members. Together, we will continue to advocate, educate, and elevate the standards of Occupational Health Nursing in South Africa. Our work matters deeply—to workers, to employers, to communities, and to the future of our country.

COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE (2025–2026)

What collaboration looks like at SASOHN:

- Strong partnerships with professional bodies, regulators, and training institutions
- Shared development of skills in audiometry, spirometry, and vision screening
- Academic webinars that connect members nationwide
- Building audit capacity through peer support and mentorship
- Ongoing advocacy to address regulatory and practice challenges
- Regional leadership driving local engagement and action

Warm regards

Joan Visser



Professional & Ethical Use of Emojis in Occupational Health Nursing, South African Health News – 2026 Feature

Report by: Joan Visser

In an increasingly digital healthcare environment, emojis have become part of everyday communication — even within Occupational Health. For South African Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs), the challenge is ensuring that these symbols support professionalism rather than compromise it.

Emojis such as 😊, 👍, and 🤝 can enhance warmth, build rapport, and soften tone in multilingual workplaces. They can help convey empathy, reduce misinterpretation, and support culturally diverse communication. However, the line between friendly and unprofessional can be crossed quickly.

A growing concern is the misuse of emojis with sexual connotations, including 🍆, 🍌, 🍑, 😏, 😬, or 😈. While these may appear humorous or harmless in social settings, their use in workplace health communication is never appropriate. Such emojis can be interpreted as suggestive, disrespectful, or harassing — and may constitute misconduct under

the Nursing Act, POPIA, and workplace sexual harassment policies.

Even seemingly innocent emojis like 😊 or 😏 can be misread, especially in sensitive clinical discussions or when communicating fitness-to-work outcomes. OHNs must remain mindful that all digital communication forms part of the professional record and may be reviewed in legal or disciplinary proceedings. The ethical standard is clear: emojis may support compassionate care, but only when used sparingly, professionally, and without ambiguity. In Occupational Health, clarity, respect, and integrity remain non-negotiable.

In conclusion, ⚠️😊👍 – 🚫🍆🍌🍑
→👉

Meaning:
• 🍆🍌🍑 = can be crossed quickly
• ⚠️ = be careful
• 🚫 = unprofessional
• — = the line/boundary
• 😊👍 = friendly





Drug Testing Compliance: Sample Collection and Integrity - J. Uys

When a Donor Cannot Provide a Urine Sample – and Why Sample Integrity Matters

In our previous newsletter, we discussed the correct procedure for conducting workplace drug screening tests. This month, we focus on two situations that occasionally arise during testing: when a donor is unable to provide a urine sample, and when there are signs that a sample may have been adulterated.

"I Can't Go Right Now"

Most donors are able to provide a urine sample without difficulty. However, some individuals may genuinely be unable to do so at the time of testing. This can occur for a variety of reasons, including anxiety, dehydration, medication effects, or a condition commonly known as "shy bladder".

When this happens, the donor is offered sealed bottled water and remains under supervision in the clinic waiting area. After approximately 20 minutes, another attempt is made. This process may be repeated for up to one hour.

The purpose of supervision is not punitive; it is to ensure the integrity of the testing process and to prevent opportunities for sample substitution or tampering. If an employee remains unable to provide a sample after one hour, he or she may be referred for medical assessment to determine whether a legitimate medical reason exists.

However, repeatedly leaving the supervised area, failing to cooperate with instructions, or other behaviour suggesting an attempt to avoid testing may be regarded as a refusal to provide a sample and will be reported to Human Resources.

What Is Sample Adulteration?

An adulterated sample is one that has been tampered with in an attempt to alter, dilute, substitute, or conceal the true test result.

Examples may include adding water or chemicals to the specimen, using another person's urine, or attempting to interfere with the testing process. To protect the integrity of the programme, testing facilities are specifically arranged to reduce opportunities for adulteration. Testers are also trained to recognise warning signs, including unusual urine colour, abnormal test-strip indicators, or suspicious behaviour during sample collection.

If adulteration is suspected, the donor is informed that the sample is invalid and is given an opportunity to provide a fresh specimen. If a second sample also shows evidence of tampering, testing continues and additional adulteration screening is performed. The findings are documented, photographed, and reported to HR for further investigation.

Fairness, Safety and Trust

Workplace drug testing is intended to be fair, respectful and consistent for all employees. Accurate results depend on valid, tamper-free samples. By following the established procedure and cooperating fully with the testing process, employees help maintain a safe, healthy and productive workplace while protecting the integrity of the programme for everyone.

Remember: A valid test starts with a valid sample. 

Results Interpretation

	Positive A colored line appears in the Control region (C) and NO line appears in the Test region (T).
	Negative Two lines appear. A colored line appears in the Control region (C) and a colored line appears in the Test region (T).
	Invalid No line appears in the Control region (C).

**NEGATIVE → LINE AT C+T
(EVEN IF THE LINE IS FAINT)**



INTERNATIONAL NURSES DAY 2026

Empower Nurses to Save Lives

Report by: Joan Visser

International Nurses Day 2026

Empower Nurses to Save Lives

A message to SASOHN members across South Africa. Every year on 12 May, the world pauses to honour the heartbeat of healthcare — nurses.

This year, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) calls on all nations to “Empower Nurses to Save Lives.” For Occupational Health Nurses (OHNs) in South Africa, this theme resonates deeply with the work we do every day in workplaces, clinics, factories, farms, and communities.

Empowerment is not an abstract idea. It is the quiet courage of an OHN who advocates for a worker’s safety. It is the calm voice that reassures someone facing a health scare. It is the clinical judgement that prevents an injury, identifies a risk, or protects a life long before an emergency ever occurs.

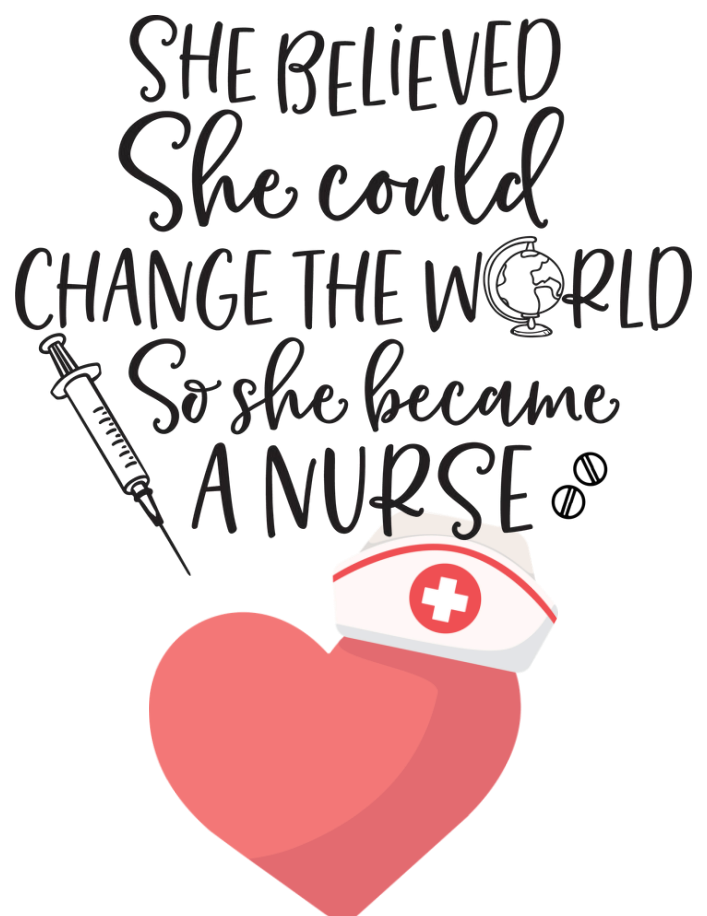
Across South Africa, OHNs continue to show extraordinary resilience. You navigate complex regulations, shifting workplace demands, psychosocial pressures, and the realities of a changing labour landscape. Yet, despite these challenges, you remain the steady presence workers trust — the person who listens, who notices, who intervenes, who cares.

Empowerment also means being supported: with resources, recognition, fair scope-of-practice protection, and opportunities to grow. It means ensuring that OHNs are not only present in workplaces, but heard, valued, and included in decisions that shape worker wellbeing.

This International Nurses Day, we celebrate you — the nurse who arrives early to prepare the clinic, the nurse who stays late to finish a report, the nurse who comforts a frightened employee, the nurse who stands firm when ethical practice is challenged. Your work saves lives in ways that are often unseen but always deeply felt.

May you continue to lead with compassion, advocate with courage, and practise with the dignity and excellence that define our profession. When nurses are empowered, workplaces are safer, families are protected, and South Africa is stronger.

Happy International Nurses Day 2026. You are valued. You are essential. You are saving lives — every single day.



JOINT CONGRESS OF ICOH WOPS & APA-PFAW 2025

Imagine! Shaping tomorrow: Work and Wellbeing (10 - 12 December 2025, University of Economics, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam)

Report by: Khanyoh Zuma

The recent Congress represented the culmination of nearly a year of careful planning, and I was privileged to once again serve as a member of the local organising committee. While organising an international conference in Vietnam presented its own unique logistical and contextual challenges, these were successfully navigated, resulting in a well-executed and impactful event.

The Congress received a total of 226 abstract submissions, reflecting a strong and diverse response from the global occupational health and industrial relations communities. Of these, 221 abstracts were accepted, 23 were rejected, and 12 were withdrawn due to personal circumstances. The high acceptance rate demonstrated the overall quality of submissions. In total, 33 countries were represented, with 141 oral presentations and 71 poster presentations delivered. Asia led participation with 80 submissions, followed by Europe (53), Oceania (31), Latin America (30), the United States (10), and South Africa (1), highlighting the truly international nature of the Congress.

I was honoured to present an oral paper titled “Beyond Bargaining: Trade Unions Championing Mental Health in a Changing World.” Drawing on my experience of nearly 20 years as a shop steward, I reflected on the traditional mandates of trade unions, which have historically focused on wages, job security, working hours, and physical safety. While these remain essential, I argued that the evolving workplace landscape necessitates an expanded role for unions, one that prioritises psychological safety, holistic wellbeing, and flexible working arrangements.

The modern world of work is increasingly shaped by remote and hybrid working models, escalating workloads, economic uncertainty, geopolitical conflict, and shifting political climates.

. These pressures are further compounded by generational changes, particularly as younger workers, including Generation Z, place a strong emphasis on mental health and work–life balance. Given that trade unions remain trusted advocates for employees and possess established negotiation mechanisms with management, they are well positioned to champion mental health policies and ensure wellbeing is embedded within organisational mandates.

In addition to presenting, I was invited to chair a session featuring guest speaker Professor Michael Quinlan, Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and Emeritus Professor of Industrial Relations at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. His presentation explored occupational health and safety regulations in the context of industrial relations, reinforcing the critical role trade unions play in safeguarding employee mental health and wellbeing. Professor Quinlan and I were subsequently invited to participate in a panel discussion held prior to the closing ceremony, further extending this important dialogue.

Several key themes emerged from the Congress that hold relevance for occupational health nurse practitioners. Foremost among these was the urgent need to actively promote mental health and wellbeing, both in the workplace and in our personal lives. Policies, procedures, and risk assessments must explicitly incorporate psychosocial health considerations. The opening keynote speaker,

Professor Birgit Aust, addressed the design and evaluation of psychosocial workplace interventions, outlining both challenges and practical solutions. She highlighted the increasing prevalence of workplace violence, harassment, and bullying, underscoring the importance of identifying and mitigating these risks.

Professor Aust also emphasised that the psychosocial work environment comprises both positive and negative elements. Positive factors include effective



Joint Congress of ICOH WOPS & APA-PFAW 2025 - continued

leadership, fair work distribution, and recognition and reward, while negative factors such as excessive workloads, time pressure, high emotional demands, and unclear roles can contribute to unhealthy work environments and mental strain. Her message reinforced the need for organisations to adopt supportive and preventative approaches rather than punitive responses.

Another compelling presentation was delivered by Professor Akinori Nakata, titled “24 Hours a Day – Are We Using Our Time Decently for a Better Tomorrow?” He explored contemporary concepts of time and productivity, critiquing the pervasive notion that “time is money” and its detrimental impact on work–life balance. Drawing on case studies from Japan, he highlighted the links between long working hours, depression, and suicide, providing a sobering reminder of the human cost of excessive work demands.

Perhaps most striking was the opportunity to learn from countries that are significantly more advanced in their policies and initiatives addressing workplace mental health. These examples served as both an eye-opener and a call to action, demonstrating what is possible when mental wellbeing is prioritised at a systemic level.

The Congress was not only a successful international gathering but also a powerful platform for advancing discussions on mental health, wellbeing, and the evolving role of trade unions and occupational health professionals. The insights gained reaffirm the responsibility of occupational health nurse practitioners to advocate for psychosocial safety, influence policy development, and contribute to healthier, more sustainable workplaces. As the world of work continues to change, so too must our approaches be placing mental health at the centre of occupational health practice.



SABINET Updates



Updates to the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA)

The Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, 1993 (Act No. 130 of 1993), as amended, has been further updated through recent Government Gazette notices issued by the Department of Employment and Labour during March-April 2026.

These amendments primarily introduce:

- Adjustments to benefit structures and administrative provisions
- Updated compensation thresholds and calculation methods
- Revised Commissioner directives and implementation measures

Employers remain responsible for:

- Registration with the Compensation Fund
- Submission of accurate earnings declarations
- Payment of assessed contributions in accordance with updated tariffs

Employees continue to be entitled to compensation for:

- Occupational injuries
- Occupational diseases
- Death benefits payable to dependants

Amendment of Schedule 4: Compensation Calculations and Pension Increases

Schedule 4 of COIDA has been amended to revise the manner of calculating compensation and pension benefits.

Key changes include:

- Updated earnings thresholds used in benefit calculations
- Adjusted monthly pension values to account for economic changes
- Modifications to formulas used to determine temporary and permanent disablement compensation

These adjustments aim to:

- Align compensation with current economic conditions
- Ensure more equitable income replacement for injured employees
- Maintain the real value of long-term pensions

Notices Issued by the Compensation Commissioner

A General Notice issued by the Acting Compensation Commissioner clarifies administrative and operational procedures under the Act.

This includes:

- Updated reporting requirements for employers

- Clarification of claims submission processes
- Implementation guidance on applying amended benefit structures
- All stakeholders (employers, employees, and medical service providers) are expected to comply with these procedural updates to ensure efficient processing of claims.

Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)

Exemptions

In terms of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 (Act No. 85 of 1993), specific exemptions have been granted in relation to certain entities referred to as SLM and CDR.

These exemptions:

- Apply to defined operational contexts or organisations
- Are granted subject to strict conditions
- Do not remove the obligation to ensure a safe and healthy working environment
- Employers benefiting from exemptions must:
- Demonstrate equivalent or improved safety measures
- Maintain compliance with core OHSA principles
- Ensure that risks are effectively managed and mitigated

Practical Implications for Employers

Following these amendments, employers should:

Compliance actions:

- Review updated COIDA earnings thresholds and tariffs
- Adjust payroll and reporting systems
- Ensure timely submission of Return of Earnings (ROE)
- Health and safety actions:
- Reassess workplace risk controls
- Verify whether any exemptions apply
- Maintain full compliance with OHSA requirements

Financial impact:

- Potential increase in assessment contributions
- Adjusted liability relating to employee compensation claims

Conclusion

The 2026 amendments reflect a broader effort to:

- Modernise compensation structures
- Improve fairness in employee benefits
- Strengthen compliance and administrative clarity
- Organisations should proactively align internal policies and procedures with these updates to ensure both legal compliance and employee protection.



Academic Day, 14 May 2026



Krystal Beactt Hotel, Gordon's Bay

14 May 2026

Hosted by: SASOHN Western Cape

