

# The Tenth International Symposium on Maritime Health

23-26 September 2009, Goa, India

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IMHA Board of Directors

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The 10th International Symposium on Maritime Health was held this year from 23rd to 26th September 2009 at the Taj Exotica Hotel in Goa, India. The theme of this high-level conference was 'Quality Maritime Health And Seafarer's Welfare — A Global Perspective' and it addressed matters regarding improvement of the quality of ship related activities worldwide, in keeping with the spirit of ILO's Maritime Labour Convention 2006 declaration. The event was very ably organised by the Seafarer's Welfare Association, India and the Maritime Health Association (IMHA), India, led by Dr Suresh Idnani, and was inaugurated by Mr Pratapsing R Rane, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Government of Goa.

The symposium was attended by stakeholders of many different national and international shipping industries, including senior representatives from the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), International Shipping Federation (ISF), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), International Committee on Seafarers Welfare (ICSW), National Seafarers Welfare Board India, International Christian Maritime Association, and other seafarer's welfare organizations, UK Department for Transport, Norwegian Maritime Directorate, unions such as Nautilus and Forward Seafarers Union of India, various national and international Shipping organizations including Intertanko and Wallem, insurance companies, training institutes, and over 200 maritime health professionals from all over the world, including many members of the International Maritime Health Association (IMHA).

Guests of Honour were Ms Lakshmi Venkatachalam, Director General of Shipping, Government of India and Mr Shanta Weerakoon, Director General of Shipping, Government of Sri Lanka, both of whom addressed the assembled delegates during the opening ceremony.

Dr. Idnani said in his introduction, "We are all operating today in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing landscape. The boundaries of public health action have become blurred, extending into other sectors that influence health opportunities and outcomes. Being aware of the HIV/AIDS problem and its consequences in the Maritime environment, IMHA has teamed up with ITF to set out a position on HIV/AIDS, whose aim is to help to protect the rights and dignity of seafarers and all those living with the virus". This view was developed in the first session, which was on HIV, Mobility, and Maritime Workers, chaired by Dr Tim Carter of the UK Maritime and Coastguard Authority, and Mr Ashok Mahapatra, IMO.

The keynote address from Ms Rosilyne Borland and Dr Nnette Motus of the IOM was followed by presentations from Dr. Nebojša Nikolić of the IMHA, Dr. Asif Altaf of the ITF, Dr David Dungan from South Africa, and Ms Elizabeth Tinoco of the ILO. Dr. Altaf screened a very interesting documentary on an HIV-positive seafarer, emphasizing various hurdles in his personal and professional life, made by Sea TV, an organisation producing informational TV programmes for seafarers worldwide. An important aim of this inaugural session was to introduce to a larger audience the joint project "The Global Partnership on HIV and Mobile Workers in the Maritime Sector" which was originally launched in April 2009, by the IMHA, IOM, ITF, ICSW, ILO, ISF, and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). The project's aims are to reduce HIV risk behaviour among seafarers, to increase access to HIV-related services for seafarers, to decrease the vulnerability of seafarers to HIV through increased ownership of strategies to reduce HIV infection by key stakeholders, and to promote best practice in HIV voluntary counselling and testing in the context of seafarer recruitment / medical screening. The session

concluded with the launch of the project by the chief guest, followed by cocktails and dinner.

The second session covered Quality and Effectiveness in Maritime Health and Seafarer's Welfare. Following a keynote address by Dr Tim Carter of the UK MCA, which set the scene admirably, Mr Dani Appave, Mr Ashok Mahapatra, Mr Peter McEwen, Mr S. Hajara, and Mr Rob Grool enlightened participants about the perspectives of ILO, IMO, trade unions, Indian ship owners, and employers, respectively.

Mr Pradeep Chawla made a presentation on the role model employer's implementation of seafarer's welfare and health provisions in Asia. Dr Sally Bell presented the auditors view on applications of quality systems to clinical practice and to cruise ship medical centres, and this was followed by a speakers' panel with a stimulating audience discussion.

Parallel sessions followed, covering Cruise Medicine, Fishing, Organisation of Health Care, and Radio Medical. In Cruise Medicine, Prof Eilif Dahl discussed crew injuries on cruise ships, Ms ShaRonne Hanson presented a speech on crew health care at sea, and Dr Nikhil Shah discussed back injuries, which are a common factor causing unfitness for work. The Fishing session was about to work-related allergies and asthma, international changes in the fishing and seafood processing environment, and the identification of agents responsible for occupational allergy and asthma, which were presented by Dr Mohamed Jeebhay, Dr Barbara Neis, and Dr Andreas Lopata, respectively. Organisation of Health Care started with a presentation from Prof Aksel Schreiner on the newly developed web-based textbook of Maritime Medicine from the Norwegian Centre for Maritime Medicine, which will soon be available free to all on the internet. Dr Luisa Canals discussed organisation of maritime health in Hispano Francophone countries, then Prof Bogdan Jaremin gave an interesting synopsis of the development of healthcare in the Polish Maritime industry over the past 60 years, and Dr Bernd Fred Schepers outlined the German guidelines on qualifications for ships doctors. Meanwhile, the Radio Medical session was concerned with the Danish model for Radio Medical (Rene Rygaard), lessons learned from the outcomes of Radio Medical cases (Lucas Viruly), and the use of digital photos in Radio Medical in Sweden (Karin Westlund).

The third keynote session was centred round seafarers' welfare, the keynote address being given by Mr Michael Pinto, ex-Secretary of Shipping to the Government of India, who discussed cultural determinants of welfare needs. Torbjorn Husby spoke on seafarers health and fitness, and then Tom Holmer from the ITF and Kimberly Karlshoej from the Teekay Foundation explained how their different organisations funded new projects, what projects were covered, and what steps should be taken by those seeking funding.

This session concluded with a speakers' panel and audience discussion.

The rest of the morning and the afternoon saw a further eight parallel sessions, causing a great deal of difficulty for those having to choose which session to attend as so many important topics were under discussion. A session on medical fitness standards covered medical screening (Dr Pascualito Gutay), conceptions of maritime medicine (Prof A I Gozhenko), and then a discussion stimulating talk on the insurers' perspective on HIV and seafaring by Mr Nigel Griffiths. The second fishing session related to Occupational Asthma (Keith Boniface) and then two presentations from Fabienne Knudsen, relating to the reduction of slips, trips, and falls by anti-slip boots and the challenge faced by researchers from the perception of risk by fishermen. A session on acute toxic effects highlighted carbon monoxide poisoning on LNG tankers and air-cooling fluid hazards, both presented by Dr. Brice Lodde, and fatal accidents following shipments of oxygen-depriving cargoes of woodchips and logs were discussed by Mr Urban Svedberg.

Long-term occupational health risks were discussed with respect to lung function and exposure in engine crew (Ralph Nilsson) work related stress (Maria Jezewska) and cancer among seamen and fishermen in the five Nordic countries (Eero Pukkala). Infection Onboard covered a food safety programme in Indonesia (Nusye Zmsiar), the risks of communicable disease onboard cargo ships (Dr Clara Schlaich), and vaccination against varicella (Dr. Nikhil Idnani). Mental Health topics discussed were stress on board (Marcus Oldenburg), aspects of employment affecting health, safety, and wellbeing of seafarers (Penny McCall Howard, and fatigue vs. safety for seafarers (Mr Leslie Olsen). A session on safety culture and prevention highlighted seafarer's occupational risks and safety culture onboard ships from Dr. Heikki Saarni, bridge resource management, human performance and maritime safety from Mr Jason Soares, and the role of the safety representative on accident prevention from Ms Hanna Barbara Rasmussen. A session on the human element and performance included a comparison of medical events on merchant ships run by different operators (Paulo Alves), job placement of disabled persons in seaports (VA Lisobey), and contrast vision and the effect of sleep deprivation (Vilhelm Koefoed).

On the final day, the fourth and last keynote session covering human factors and occupational risk prevention, was chaired by Lucas Viruly and Philip Wake, and presentations covered bridge resource management (Nicholas Cooper), human factors and emergencies at sea (Minerva Alfonso, and fatigue (Bernt Koning). A speakers' panel and audience discussion followed.

The parallel sessions included a further session on the human element and performance, with presentations on

Stress Management (Anushilan Boudhankar), noise-related hearing disorders (Neeladri Misra), and seafarers, welfare workers, and seafarers' health care (Ricardo van Lent). History and health covered the influence of India's former colonial status on its maritime development (Dr Tim Carter), the testing of navigators' eyesight (Vilhelm Koefed), and seafaring and health issues in Asia (H Wickramatillake). The second radio medical session included seafarers health counselling in Hamburg (Clara Schlaich), health promotion at sea (Lulu Hjarnoe), and international cooperation and organisation (Kiryaman Cagribay). Occupational health and repatriation were discussed by Marcus Brauer, who reviewed medically disembarked crew from cruise ships, Shah Manish who presented quality care of maritime dermatoses, and Sanjay B Dabadgaonkar, who presented the effects of radio frequency radiation hazards.

The Symposium closed with a presentation from the organising committee from Odessa, regarding ISMH 11, which is to be held in 2011 in Odessa, Ukraine. Awards were given for the winning posters, for contributions to maritime health, and certificates were presented to those who had passed their Masters' Degree at the University of Tarragona.

During the conference, a number of other meetings were held, including one of the IMHA Workgroup on the ship's medical chest, where the work started at the IMHA Athens workshop was progressed, and the IMHA workgroup on medical standards, who are assisting the ILO in a full re-

view of fitness standards for seafarers. A number of detailed and informative posters were also presented. One very full evening was taken up by the General Meeting of the IMHA, where members voted for the new IMHA Board, as well as discussing other important topics relating to the future advancement of the IMHA. More news of course can be found on the IMHA website, but one very important decision was made regarding the relationship of the IMHA with International Maritime Health, and the proposal that IMH should become the official journal of the IMHA was accepted by a majority following an informative presentation on the history of the journal by Prof Bogdan Jaremin.

It is not possible here to cover in more detail the varied range of subjects presented during the Symposium, but happily, more information is already available on the IMHA website, including a list of participants, and details of abstracts and posters. This will not only be a useful resource for those who were unable to attend, but a splendid reminder for those of us who were there of a really constructive stay in Goa, not only with excellent scientific and academic content, but also a busy social programme, with splendid lunches and dinners, and plenty of time to discuss important topics during the breaks or after dinner in the bar with colleagues from all over the world. The only down side was that there was so much to do and say that participants had less time than they may have liked to make the most of the swimming pool and the beach. Roll on Odessa!