

REPORT ON THE SIXTH EUROPEAN MEETING OF THE WHO COLLABORATING CENTRES IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

MADRID, SPAIN, 14-16 OCTOBER 2008

The Meeting was held at the invitation of the European Institute of Health and Social Wellbeing. There were 54 participants from both the WHO Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health, the National Focal Points, WHO Headquarters, WHO Regional Office for Europe, European Agency on Safety and Health at Work, and the International Trade Union Confederation.

Participants from Gdynia were Prof.Dr Bogdan Jaremin, Director of the Interfaculty Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine (WHO Collaborating Centre on Maritime Occupational Health) of the Medical University of Gdansk, Poland, and Dr Maria Jezewska.

The agenda of the meeting included the Marco Maroni Memorial Lecture, a progress report of the WHO activities and achievements in the Collaborating Centres since the Buxton Meeting in March 2007, a situation analysis of the baseline survey in the European Region, a report on the results of the First Meeting of the National Contact Persons for Workers' Health, a proposal for intensified research collaboration among US and European Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health, and further development of the Work Plan for the European Region concerning the implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health. In addition, the Working Groups discussed in detail the current activities in selected topical areas from the viewpoint of implementing the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health.

In addition to the reports and conclusions of the Working Groups, the participants of the meeting approved six general conclusions and recommendations.

During the deliberations of the meeting, for the first time maritime medicine was distinguished as a separate element of occupational medicine.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

The European Network of WHO Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health comprises more than 30 national institutes and scientific organizations. The fifth meeting of the network in Buxton, March 2007, reviewed the work plan of the members in relation to the objectives of the WHO Global Plan of Action (GPA) on Workers' Health 2008–2017, and discussed possible multi-centre projects for the implementation of the GPA in the European Region.

The purpose of this meeting was to review the progress since the Buxton meeting, and to adjust the work plans to bring them into line with the regional implementation of the GPA. The ILO and the EC were invited to contribute. The WHO Biennial Collaborative Agreement activities in the member states, sub-regional initiatives (e.g. the Baltic Sea Network on Occupational Health and Safety, South-East European Network, CIS countries) and selected topics (e.g. maritime health, nanotechnology, psychosocial risks and mental health at work) were on the agenda, just to mention a few. The agreed Regional Plan of Implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health, and the adjusted work plans of the European Collaborating Centres will direct the future work of the Network members, and will be reported to the Global Network Meeting in September 2009.

CONTENTS OF WORK FOR 2008–2012

The Working Groups, based on the five Objectives of the Global Plan of Action (GPA) integrated their plans and proposals to the 2008-2012 Draft Work Plan for implementation of the Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health.

The five objectives are:

Objective 1: To devise and implement policy instruments on workers' health

Objective 2: To protect and promote health at the workplace

Objective 3: To improve the performance of and access to occupational health services

Objective 4: To provide and communicate evidence for action and practice

Objective 5: To incorporate workers' health into other policies

Five additional working groups on various key topics also discussed and surveyed the current activities of the European Collaborating Centres in Occupational Health.

These were:

Group 1. Workplace Health Promotion (WHP)

Group 2. Psychosocial Risks and Mental Health at Work

Group 3. Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders

Group 4. Nanotechnology and Workers' Health

Group 5. Maritime Health

The work and conclusions of the Working Groups in this Meeting will directly contribute to the implementation of the WHO Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health in the European Region. The reports of the Working Groups are attached as Annexes to the Summary Report published by WHO.

PROGRESS REPORT: COLLABORATING CENTRES IN MARITIME HEALTH

Prof. Xaver Baur, Director of the Institute of Occupational and Maritime Medicine in Hamburg, chaired the Session on institutes' presentations on maritime health.

Dr. Fabienne Knudsen, Center of Maritime Health and Safety, **Denmark**, briefly described the activities of the Center in Esbjerg. Earlier, the staff consisted primarily of medical personnel, now there are more sociologists on board. Studies conducted in Denmark showed that Filipino seafarers were involved in fewer accidents than Danish seafarers. Now, the aim of further investigations is to try to find out the reasons for this. Health promotion activities are also being carried out. Physical activity, stop smoking courses, etc. are on the agenda of health promotion.

Prof. Bogdan Jaremin, Director of the Institute - WHO CC in Gdynia, **Poland**, described the activities of this Institute. Publishing the journal International Maritime Health is one of the projects included in the WHO Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health. In 2007, volume 58 of this journal was published and distributed. The next 59/2008 volume of the IMH will be published in print and for the first time also in the internet, with the support of the ITF Seafarers' Trust.

Teaching is one of the main tasks of the Institute. In 2007, series of seminars on maritime occupational health were conducted there for students of the VI year of the Medical Faculty, Medical University of Gdansk.

The staff of the Institute, medical doctors, chemists, psychologists, are engaged in conducting research on the health problems of seafarers. The results of some projects were reported at the time of the 9th International Symposium on Maritime Health which was held in Esbjerg, Denmark, in June 2007 (3 presentations made there). Prof. Jaremin drew attention to the fatalities occurring on board ships. He also mentioned the ILO Conventions on Maritime Safety and Health, and the need for the countries to ratify them.

Dr. Marcus Oldenburg, Institute of Occupational and Maritime Medicine, Hamburg, **Germany**, described the activities of his unit. He mentioned that both physical and psychological stress is present in the work of seamen. He also reported on an investigation that had been carried out by his unit, on the health and safety of 161

seamen, with particular attention to the coronary heart disease risk factors in this study group. The seafarers had a similar coronary heart risk as the PROCAM population.

Dr. Alf Magne Horneland, Director of the Norwegian Centre for Maritime Medicine, Bergen, **Norway**, described the background for establishing the Centre: the work environment of seafarers presents many health risks, and the life expectancy of seafarers is shorter than that of the general population. Telemedicine was seen as an important development target for this branch. The Telemedicine Network aims at an improved service level for seafarers. He also referred to a recently published by WHO third edition of the International Medical Guide for Ships (IMGS), and pointed out that it is intended as a manual for a teaching course, and not so much to help seafarers to meet an emergency situation onboard ship. A collaborative network of maritime medicine centres in Europe was called for. The ILO Convention No. 164, Maritime Labour Convention 2006, and respective EC Directive were mentioned as important background documents for the work of such centres.

Dr. Lygia Budnik, University of Hamburg, described health risks due to fumigants. The international transport of consumer goods has increased during the past few years. Importing countries require that the freight containers need to be fumigated in order to prevent distributing pests worldwide. This has, however, led to fatalities on board the ships. 1100 container air measurements were performed in Hamburg and Rotterdam harbours over two and a half years (2006–2008). Ethylene chloride and methyl bromide were analysed in the air samples. Dr. Budnik pointed out that most of the people are unaware of the existence of these chemicals, they are odourless and colourless, and they thus escape subjective detection. They have also studied whether there were residues of the chemicals in the goods transported. According to their measurements, there have been emissions of these substances from the products even after 6 months.

Prof. Baur described the opportunities for various collaborative projects and also mentioned the International Medical Guide for Ships (WHO, 2008).

PROTECTION AND PROMOTION HEALTH AT THE WORKPLACE

(Objective 2) Rapporteur: Aditya Jain

The priorities were slightly modified, and one priority was added. A toolkit was added to prevent global health threats, such as TB, etc. Some of the toolkits already developed would be implemented and evaluated. The collaboration of the EU-OSHA was called for in particular areas. When projects end, conferences should be organized to disseminate the results. The deliverables would be toolkits developed, implemented, and evaluated. Funding would be expected to come from the EU and national funding sources. Identification of existing projects was taken as a second priority. Development

of sectoral toolkits, for branches of economy such as transport, agriculture and construction in particular, was the third priority. The Collaborating Centres will be asked to report on their projects that will fit into the Objective 2.

MARITIME HEALTH

(Working Group 5) Rapporteur: Prof. Xaver Baur

The Group deemed that most of the projects fit into Objective 2 of GPA. Knowing the causes of fatalities and occupational diseases is important for preventive purposes. Stress and fatigue in seafaring was the first new proposal to be added to the projects. This could be implemented as a joint work for several Collaborating Centres. Prevention of occupational asthma is another project to be added. Strategies to prevent this disease are important because it is prevalent in most countries.

One additional project proposed was telemedicine. Limited actions have been carried out by the Norwegian Centre. They are building up a network in this field, which would expand the activities in the field of maritime health, and would also fit into Objective 3 of the GPA. The new edition of the WHO International Medical Guide for Ships was also discussed, and it was concluded that it is intended more for teaching, than for practical use onboard a ship. An annex could be added to the IMGS.

The Group asked WHO to include two additional centres, in Bergen, Norway and in Cardiff, UK, to the Network of WHO Collaborating Centres in Maritime Health.

Discussion:

Dr Rokho Kim, Programme Manager, Occupational Health, WHO/EURO explained the process of designation of the WHO Collaborating Centres, and said that in 2010 the new Centres could be added.

The discussions in the group proceeded smoothly because of the long-time tradition of the Collaborating Centres in Maritime Health to work together. The priorities chosen for future work were: Stress and fatigue (M. Oldenburg as a responsible person), loss of lives at sea - we should need to know the causes of these fatalities. A national register on deaths at sea was proposed. How to translate this evidence and information into practice was also called for. Promotion of health was deemed as an important issue in seafarers occupational health.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The GPA has offered an opportunity to develop occupational health and safety activities both globally, regionally and at the country level. The inclusion of occupational health and safety in the Medium-term Strategic Goals of WHO is a

positive stimulus. Steering and funding mechanisms are not fully developed, and here we would need further strengthening - more stable funding mechanisms need to be looked for. Dissemination and sharing work products should also be improved. Here the role of the Regional Office as the publisher of technical reports could be strengthened. Also, the possibility of co-publishing between WHO EURO and a Collaborating Centre could be looked into. The way forward was described as follows: the development of the Regional Work Plan; the establishment of the European Network for Workers' Health; the contribution of the Collaborating Centres to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD11); strengthening health systems for workers through country work; mainstreaming and linking the activities with other public health programmes; organizing joint events of WHO, ILO and EU; implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting; securing dissemination of information and strengthening the steering and funding mechanisms.

The Meeting participants expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the Institute of Health and Social Wellbeing in Madrid for the excellent organization and arrangements of this event.

The next meeting of the Network will be held in 2010. As the venue of it has rotated, the possibility of organizing it in the South-East European Region will be looked into.

(Contributed by M.Jezewska)