I would like to thank the many readers who have made contact since the last issue of e-SOHN went online. It is important that you keep on emailing and letting me know what you wish to see in your newsletter.

There is plenty to celebrate in this issue. The first is the election of David Maslen-Jones to the NMC Committee to represent community public health nursing. Next is the award of an honorary fellowship of the Society of Occupational Medicine to Cynthia Atwell. There are further details of both these inside. We also celebrate the appointment of Sharon Horan as RCN Adviser in Professional Nursing Development. Sharon, who has contributed so much to SOHN, now will be able to consolidate her work for occupational health nursing alongside Jan Maw and Carol Bannister at the RCN. Sadly, Sharon's appointment has required her to step down as SOHN Chair, and Cynthia, with overwhelming support from the other committee members, has agreed to take over as Chair. It is also sad that Sandra Winters, who contributed so much towards the success of last year's annual SOHN conference, has stood down due to pressures in her new job. She will be missed by all her colleagues, but there is no doubt that she will continue to buzz around the world of occupational health with her usual verve and enthusiasm. This means that there are two vacancies on the SOHN Committee, for which we look forward to receiving many applications. For more information, please see below.

Another celebration is the appointment of Professor Dame Carol Black, currently president of the Royal College of Physicians, as National Director for Health and Work, a post she will take over later this summer. A profile of Professor Black will be included in the next issue of e-SOHN, due to go online at the beginning of September.

Bashyr Aziz

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SOHN Committee

Due to the resignation of Sharon Horan and Sandra Winters, there are two available positions on the SOHN Committee. Caroline Whittaker and Fiona Colegrave, both former committee members, have been co-opted into these positions until elections can take place. If you are passionate about occupational health nursing, and you have the time and dedication required, then please get your nomination pack now from RCN Direct or the RCN website. The closing date for nominations is Friday, 14 June 2006, and results will be announced by Monday, 25 September 2006.

Bashyr Aziz, Editor
(Artist: Mark Graham)
After four years in Harrogate, the RCN Congress returned to the newly refurbished Bournemouth International Centre. The gloomy weather on the opening day matched the mood of many delegates, who were angry with the Government firstly because of the uncertainty of payments to NHS staff still on Whitley terms, secondly due to the recently announced miserly pay awards, and finally because of the spectre of redundancies, which, for some, had become a reality. There was also a distinct feeling that the RCN itself had let its forum members down in its proposed professional development framework (PDF).

After the first day, the weather brightened, but the mood of members remained sombre. The sheer anger shown by many towards Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt became manifest in jeers and foot stamping of the sort not normally witnessed at RCN Congress, even in the presence of government ministers with unpopular messages.

It was perhaps a little sad that the prominence given by the media to Ms Hewitt’s speech obscured the fact that other speakers fared a lot better. UN Ambassador Stephen Lewis gave an address on HIV and AIDS in Africa for which he received a five-minute standing ovation. He provided an apocalyptic insight into the devastation of a continent, and the catastrophic effect on African society, especially young children, due to the loss of so many women to AIDS. He said that it was nurses who were responsible for ‘keeping the nation alive’. As this giant of a man left the stage, humbled and a little embarrassed by the strength of the applause, there was hardly a dry eye in the audience.

SOHN was proud to jointly sponsor the John Goodlad Memorial Lecture, which was given by John McCarthy, the journalist who had been held hostage in Beirut ten years ago. Normally this lecture attracts about 100 delegates, but on this occasion, the main auditorium was full. John gave an interesting account of his experiences. He used his story, poignant with some ironic humour, to deal with the issue of bullying and to emphasise how sometimes you just have to stand up and say no despite consequences that could be serious.

Election was held for two executive board members: Bernie Jackson (UK) was elected Vice President and Susan Pierrot (France) was elected Secretary, both unanimously. Both these positions are very demanding, requiring commitment to the development of links with other EU bodies and maintaining that link with the other members of the Board.

Harmonising OH Nurse Education in the European Union (HOHNEU)

The FOHNEU President reported that the HOHNEU project was progressing well and many of the learning programmes were being written and will be piloted shortly. The purpose of HOHNEU project is to develop a distance learning educational curriculum for OH nurses, with the aim of standardising OH nurse education across Europe. The programme is being developed by the University of Sheffield, in collaboration with other EU Countries and FOHNEU.

The programme will be in three stages:
- Year 1 PG Certificate – 60 UK CATS (20 ECTS)
- Year 2 PG Diploma – 120 UK CATS (40 ECTS)
- Year 3 Masters degree - 180 UK CATS (60 ECTS).

Students will be able to exit the programme at the stage of their choice.

The HOHNEU project will be formally launched at the FOHNEU Congress in London in September 2007.

FOHNEU Working Groups

Within FOHNEU there are several working groups, the purpose of which is to develop initiatives to promote the role of the OH Nurses within the EU. The chart opposite shows the present structure of these groups.

FOHNEU Congress 2007

Vice Chair RCN European Group and UK FOHNEU Board Member Cynthia Atwell urges your support

The 2007 FOHNEU Congress will be held at the New Connaught Rooms in London from 19 to 21 September 2007. The call for papers will be available soon at the FOHNEU website: www.fohneu.org. Occupational health nurses from all over Europe will be there, and UK practitioners are urged to support this prestigious event.

Next meeting

The next FOHNEU meeting will be held in Spain on 21 to 23 September 2006.
The 2006 Spring FOHNEU board meeting was held in Turku, Finland from 6 to 8 April. Chair of the RCN OH European Group Bernie Jackson, and Vice Chair Cynthia Atwell were the UK representatives. Also present were representatives from Belgium, France, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, and Spain. The weather was sunny and crisp, but bone-shatteringly cold and the sea and river were still frozen! The Finnish Nurses’ Association provided wonderful hospitality, culminating in a superb meal on the final day. Some of the matters discussed were as follows:

**EU countries’ national updates**

**Finland**
A new law, introduced in February 2006, strengthens the official monitoring of occupational health and safety standards.

**France**
There are moves to create a ‘nursing order’, which would be the equivalent to the UK Nurses and Midwives Act, but this has been rejected by their parliament. However, the activists there are not deterred and are to continue to lobby for statutory recognition.

**Ireland**
The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 has been introduced. This spells out the responsibilities of managers and employees and is comparable to the UK Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

**Netherlands**
In 2005, the law requiring employers to provide occupational health services was changed, and subsequently a number of occupational health nurses have lost their jobs. This has highlighted the importance of ensuring that occupational health services are part of the business and are able to demonstrate added value to the business, and that occupational health nurses should not expect to be employed purely because the law requires it.

**European Specialist Nurses Organisations (ESNO)**
FOHNEU President Julie Staun (Denmark) reported that a ‘memorandum of understanding’ had been drawn up for this group, which will link into the European Federation of Nurses.

There are 30 different specialist groups in Europe, 12 of which, including FOHNEU, are represented on ESNO. There is also a specialist group for Educators (European Federation of Nurse Educators).

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**Sign up for e-SOHN Alert**

If you would like to receive an email whenever a new issue of e-SOHN goes up, please send an email to: bashyr@wlv.ac.uk, with ‘e-SOHN’ in the subject line.
OH nursing gets new voice at the NMC

Amazing turnout
Outnumbered seven to one on the third part of the NMC Register by health visitors alone, occupational health nurses succeeded in getting a representative elected to the NMC. "I cannot begin to tell you the surprise I experienced when I received a phone call to say that I had been elected as alternative member for Specialist Community Public Health Nurses for England," said a delighted David Maslen-Jones. It was obvious that on a turnout generally of around 12 per cent, occupational health nurses had rallied around to produce, at 1,500 votes, a turnout that was much higher than the national average.

David’s past roles
David first went into occupational health at a defence research agency site in mid-Wales in the mid-nineties – whilst there, he commenced his occupational health degree course at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen by distance learning. He then moved to Hazelwood Foods in Wrexham, where he worked in a twin role as a health and safety advisor, as well as occupational health nurse, which provided some conflicts of interest.

After this, David moved with his family to Plymouth, to work as an occupational health manager for Devonport Royal Dockyard. He later became Senior Occupational Health Nurse Manager for an independent occupational health provider across the South and West of England before returning to the NHS in August 2003, where, last summer, he was appointed as a nurse consultant in occupational health.

David is past Chair of the RCN SOHN Southwest Group and is a committee member of the Association of NHS Occupational Health Nurses (ANHONS). He also represents the Association of Occupational Health Nurse Educators at the Occupational Health Nursing Managers’ Forum.

How the NMC can improve OH services
There are twenty-four practitioner members and eleven lay members, all appointed by the Government through the Privy Council, at the NMC. The core duty of the NMC, of course, is the protection of the public, which it achieves through establishing and improving standards of nursing. “I do not feel that in moving us all into this wider public health role, the NMC has considered the present role of OH nurses,” said David. “In fact, this wider role envisaged by the Government in their white paper ‘Choosing health’, which is looking for access to all types of health care to be provided in work, is more about saving money for the NHS than developing occupational health services.” Most occupational health nurses would agree with David that part of their role should have a wider health promoting remit, but where do the time and resources come from when most occupational health nurses are working flat out just to maintain statutory compliance, or to assist HR with attendance management?

For the past two years, David has been an NMC visitor, alongside Jan Maw, and has been providing quality assurance on behalf of the NMC for occupational health programmes throughout England and latterly Wales, so he is already well aware of what the NMC does. He has also been aware, that for too long, the NMC has not had, or perhaps not sought, adequate advice with regards to what an occupational health nurse actually does. This is perhaps reflected in the Standards of proficiency for specialist community

NMC plans radical changes to OH education and practice
As David Maslen-Jones has suggested, the Nursing and Midwifery Council does at times seem to be out of touch with requirements of education and practice in occupational health nursing. In recent months, the NMC has come up with the following suggestions, which to some occupational health nurses will seem quite bizarre:

- courses in specialist community public health nursing (SCPHN) should become generic, so that all health visitors, school nurses and occupational health nurses receive the same training
- currently, every SCPHN is identified as health visitor, school nurse or occupational health nurse (RSCPHN-HV, RSCPHN-SN, or RSCPHN-OH respectively). The NMC proposes that by 2009, they will become generic SCPHNs, losing their specialist suffixes
- all occupational health nurses studying towards an SCPHN qualification will be supernumerary in their placements during their training, under the supervision of a practice teacher who has teaching qualifications
- practice teachers providing mentorship to SCPHN students will have prescribed amounts of time dedicated to their educative role, amounting to more than half a day per week for full-time students.

While keeping an open mind, occupational health nurse leaders in education and practice do have some concerns about the potential implications of some of these changes. A meeting has been arranged for late June between the educators’ association (AOHNE) and the NMC. Information about outcomes will be provided in a special report in the next issue of e-SOHN. For information about education in occupational health nursing, including contact details for all occupational health nurse educators in the UK, go to http://tinyurl.com/z3k49
public health nurses’, published in 2004, which provides a number of challenges for occupational health nurses.

Issues to address

One of many issues is the NMC’s insistence of supernumerary status for nurses on occupational health degree courses. Whilst recognising that there has to be some ring fencing of protected time during an educational programme, private employers cannot afford financially or otherwise to let their OH nurses become supernumerary; the likelihood then is that they will not fund nurses to go onto these programmes. There are other challenges, such as that of nurse prescribing, something which, at present, the NMC sees as an integral part of future occupational health nurse training, and the requirement for practice teachers to supervise occupational health nurses whilst in placements, and during training. This is a problem when there are not enough occupational health nurses to go round. “It is to challenge some of these issues, and to provide occupational health input to standards, and different NMC committees, to which I must devote my time,” said David.

There is also a bigger picture that the NMC needs to address, which relates to the changes and skill mix, reductions in funding, and day-to-day stress, to which all nurses, not only those working in occupational health, are subjected daily, both in and outside the health service. If the NMC is to be truly involved in protecting the public, then it needs to ensure that the standards of care given by nurses are not being compromised by Trusts that are placing funding objectives above the needs of patients.

David Maslen-Jones, newly appointed alternative member for community specialist nurses at the NMC has a message for occupational health nurses: “I feel honoured to be elected by my peers, and I believe that it is important that as a group, occupational health nurses now have one more voice. If you have particular practice issues that need to be raised at a higher level, then please do not hesitate to contact me.”

I am sure that all readers will join me in giving their heartiest congratulations to David.
Leeds

This group meets on the second Wednesday every month (except August) at 6.30 pm. This year’s programme includes presentations about data protection, especially in relation to IT systems in OH, upper limb disorders, skin disease, law and work-related stress.

It is a friendly group, with a Christmas meal incorporated into the December meeting. Attendance at meetings varies from 5 to 35 people. Amongst the speakers invited this year is Diana Kloss, and new members are very welcome.

Contact Rita Ogden, Secretary on telephone: 0113 206 5224, mobile: 07890 300801, or on email: rita.ogden@leedsth.nhs.uk

Nottinghamshire

This group meets quarterly on Wednesday evenings, usually at the RCN HQ on Albion Street, Nottingham. On top of these meetings, the group tries to arrange an annual workplace visit. Meetings usually start at 6.00 pm with a light snack. Recent sessions have included: an update on the new noise and vibration regulations; making an ergonomic case for decent chairs; the role of the SCPHN; and for something different, a visit to a vineyard. The group also has its own e-network.

For more information, please contact Wendy Jones on telephone: 0115 984 3577 or at email: w.jones@lboro.ac.uk

Hertfordshire

The Hertfordshire group meets five times annually, usually in St Albans. It is a small, friendly group that welcomes new members. Many of the members work alone and they consider that networking, sharing ideas and providing support for each other are very important roles for the group. The group is also eager to increase collaborative work with practice nurses, who are also invited to the meetings, which are normally held at St Albans City Hospital every two months on a Tuesday at 6.00 pm. Topics planned for this year include musculo-skeletal functional testing, the Data Protection Act, back pain management, magnet therapy and a legal update. It is a membership-led group, and ideas for speakers are sought from all members.

Please contact Jackie Parker on telephone: 01582 395511 or email: occupational.health@ltn.aero, or contact Sue Shaw on telephone: 01707 666405 or email: sshaw@rvc.ac.uk

Greater Manchester

This is a very active and friendly group, whose members use their considerable skills and experience to support each other, particularly those, such as independent practitioners and agency workers, who work alone. A secret of our success is probably networking, and the group includes members of local government groups, the NHS and AOHNP. The group also holds joint meetings with the IOSH Public Services Group, which helps to improve collaborative working between safety and health professionals.

Financial support comes from sponsorship by companies whose representatives also provide invaluable advice and help. Without this, the Group’s annual conference held every June, and its dinner held in November, would not be the highly successful and enjoyable events they have been in the past few years.

A website with links to various...
organisations is currently being developed with the help of two of the sponsors. At present, messages are passed on through one person, which has its difficulties. We hope these issues will be resolved once the website is in place.

Membership of a group such as this one gives occupational health nurses a political voice, essential for a professional group that has a lot of responsibility without power. People are a lot more likely to listen to the collective voice of a group.

Please contact Chris Bate, Secretary, on telephone: 01457 863090 or email: chrisandpete@btinternet.com

Wales

The Welsh RCN Occupational Health Forum covers the whole of Wales and is made of four main areas: North/West/Mid and South East Wales. All groups feed into the forum, which last met in March 2006.

The forum has lobbied the HSE, copying in the Welsh National Assembly, the RCN, Wales Centre for Health and Shaw Trust to form long overdue partnerships and to involve occupational health nurses in the fulfilment of targets for the strategy ‘Revitalising health and safety’ and the white paper ‘Choosing health’, and the new Welsh initiative of ‘Health Challenge Wales’ – information on this can be found at: http://tinyurl.com/jobze.

The Wales Centre for Health is mapping nurse training, including occupational health, in Wales, and a project survey of access to occupational health services has started. There also is a proposed research project in Merthyr, a hotspot for high incapacity levels, to examine ways of addressing inequalities in health. It is anticipated that occupational health nurses will be involved in all these.

Cardiff University has a one-million-pound research project to look at the communications skills of GPs during consultations with regard to improving health management, and in particular with regard to the workplace.

Next year, there will be a conference on ‘Taking up and flying the OH banner in Wales’, which will be free to all occupational health nurses practising in Wales.

Many occupational health nurses in Wales have not transferred over to the third part of the NMC Register, mainly due to their lack of recognised qualifications, so the proposed portfolio process (see article, page eight) is a welcome alternative to retraining for that elusive recognised degree.

Things are moving ahead, and the forum aims to keep up the momentum and secure Welsh RCN Board commitment to the forum. Occupational health nurses who are not in a local group or who have not signed up to the forum are encouraged to sign up and register their support, to enable them, as a united force, to contribute to health improvement in Wales.

For details, contact Lynda Spear at email: Lynda.spear@kier.co.uk or on telephone: 029 203 36161, or contact the RCN Headquarters Ty Maeth in Cardiff at website: www.rcn.org.uk/wales, or telephone: 029 2075 1373 or 0845 456 7875.

Involved with a regional group or an OH special interest group?

If so, you should consider letting occupational health nurses know about your group through e-SOHN (see these pages for an update on regional groups).
Cynthia Atwell has been appointed an honorary fellow of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine (HonFFOM) at the Royal College of Physicians. This is a rare honour for a nurse, and another feather in the cap for Cynthia, who also remains the only occupational health nurse to have served as Commissioner at the Health and Safety Commission.

Cynthia has dedicated many years to occupational health nursing. Currently she is an independent consultant who established the occupational health diploma course at the University of Warwick, with which she continues to be involved.

Over the past 30 years as occupational health nurse, Cynthia has worked in heavy engineering, food and agriculture, the NHS and local government. She also served as Head of Nursing at BUPA Occupational Health and as Chief Occupational Health Nursing Adviser at British Rail. Cynthia has been on the SOHN Steering Committee for a number of years, and she agreed to step in as Chair recently when Sharon resigned on appointment as PND Adviser (see page one).

Cynthia, an honorary life member of AOHNP (UK), Vice Chair of the RCN European Group and SOHN representative at FOHNEU, member of BOHS and of advisory committees at the Federation of Small Businesses and the Engineering Employers’ Federation, enjoys skiing, music, gardening and travel, when time permits.

Members of the RCN met with the NMC Professional Advisor in March for an update on the proposed portfolio route of entry to Part 3 (Specialist Community Public Health Nursing) of the NMC Register.

The portfolio route is an opportunity for nurses working in occupational health, and who have both experience and qualifications that have not previously been recorded with UKCC/ NMC, to put together a portfolio of evidence that demonstrates that they have achieved both practice and knowledge equivalent to the standards set for Specialist Community Practitioner Qualification. On verification that the standards have been met, the nurse will then be able to migrate to Part 3 of the Register. SCPHN standards can be found at the NMC website at: www.nmc-uk.org, and there is also a link to them through the pages of the Association of Occupational Health Nurse Educators’ website at: http://tinyurl.com/z3k49.

NMC Committee will be discussing the proposal in April and it is anticipated that the proposals will be approved by Council at the beginning of June. Subsequent to any decision made by both the SCPHN Committee in April and Council in June, and to any amendments they may make, you should be able to present your portfolios to participating universities for verification. Participating universities will be those who currently offer the SPQ/ SCPHN.

It is also likely that the cut-off point for accessing Part 3 of the Register by portfolio route will cease at the end of September 2007. Therefore, if you are considering taking this option you should start building your portfolio of evidence now, by mapping your knowledge and skills against the SCPHN standards. You should also take steps to make early contact with universities currently delivering the SCPHN/ SPQ (OHN) programme to see if they are participating in the portfolio verification route to Part 3, and to clarify what their specific requirements will be.

As soon as we have more details on these proposals, we will publish more information on the RCN web pages and in e-SOHN. In the meantime, please keep a watchful eye on the NMC web pages.

Jan Maw – PND Advisor for OHN

April 2006