One of the highlights of this year's activities of the Society of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (SOEM), Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) was the SOEM MMA AGM Seminar entitled OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS: DO'S AND DON'TS. This was held in conjunction with the MMA AGM at Hotel Renaissance, Melaka on 26 May 2010.

The response was good. It was officiated by Tan Sri Datuk Dr RP Lingam, the organising chairman of the 50th MMA AGM and past president of MMA.

Dr G Jayakumar an occupational physician from Surya College, Penang delivered the opening lecture for the day, deliberating on 'The Changing Face in Occupational Health'. He dwelled on the transition of hazards faced by occupational physicians in the last decade. He recapitulated the statement by Dr Shigeru Omi, WHO Regional, Director for the Western Pacific, World Health Organization (2006) that healthcare workers were the unsung heroes of our time. There is a shortage of almost 4.3 million doctors, midwives, nurses and support workers worldwide. One of the main reasons for this is the unappreciative nature of the job carried out by these healthcare professionals who toil for long hours at the risk of their own lives. Globalisation has allowed healthcare professionals to procure jobs that are less stressful and risky. The last two decades has seen a rise of re-emerging diseases like tuberculosis, HIV and AIDs taking a toll on healthcare professionals who face a higher risk compared to other professionals. The Severe Respiratory Distress Syndrome posed a severe threat to this group of workers who comprised 21% of those who succumbed to the disease globally and 40% in Canada and Singapore. Amidst the risk faced during such outbreaks, the social discrimination faced by these professionals even led to suicides. We foresee that the acute shortage of healthcare
professionals will prevail if long term measures are not instituted to overcome this situation by looking into their workplace and work processes that place a threat to their own health and well being.

Associate Professor Dr Retneswari Masilamani from University Malaya addressed an important topic on 'Stress at Work - A Balancing Act' where she emphasised that everything about stress was not bad. Human beings need some amount of stress to initiate them to execute their day-to-day activities and responsibilities without which they may be unproductive. One needs to work at an optimal level to achieve one's targets and goals beyond which distress sets in. We need to be aware that when talking about job stress, there are other confounding factors namely, personality traits and domestic factors. The cause of job stress needs to be identified to adequately address this factor. There are several factors at work that can cause stress, namely work load, role conflict, job insecurity, lack of recognition, poor work control, indecisiveness etc. Though several solutions like exercising, meditation, breathing exercises can provide temporary relief, the ultimatum is to accurately identify the stressor and tackle it.

Dr Badrul Hisham Abdul Samad, the state epidemiologist from the Communicable Disease Unit, Johor Health Department delivered a very impressive talk on 'The Air Circulation in the Hospital - Bad, Good and Better!' He highlighted the importance of air circulation or ventilation especially in healthcare facilities. Many of us are even unaware of the existence of such a requirement in a hospital where the air can be constantly exposed to contamination of bacteria, virus and fungus. Ventilation is about the volume of air per unit time moved in and out of an enclosed space m³/hr. Proper ventilation in healthcare settings enable us to maintain desired temperature and humidity, remove unwanted 'waste' from the air, minimises the risk of airborne infection, creates a safe and healthy environment and lastly, for ensuring energy efficiency in reducing costs. Certain areas in the hospital must have higher standards of ventilation namely, operation theatres with at least 20 air changes per hour and other high risk areas for nosocomial infection like TB wards, isolation rooms, laboratories and intensive care units. Dr Badrul shared some of the air circulation levels measured in different parts of the hospital and health offices in Johor.

He also described the mode of transmission of legionellosis from the cooling towers of hospitals into human beings and air conditioning units. Some photos were showed to exhibit natural ventilation in certain infections areas like TB wards, isolation rooms and treatment rooms. The principles in the construction of a negative pressure room especially in isolation wards were well explained. In a negative pressure room, air moves from high pressure to low pressure. This allows air from adjacent places to move into the isolation or negative pressure room but not vice versa.

Dr Lee Lay Tin a senior consultant and head of the Occupational Health Department, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Singapore addressed the importance of protecting healthcare professionals adequately at their workplaces amidst the numerous hazards faced by them. Dr Rajib Ghosh, the senior manager from Singapore Aeromedical Centre, highlighted that computer usage was part and parcel of every worker's job, including health care professionals. He emphasised the importance of an ergonomic workstation in the use of computers to avert musculoskeletal disorders. Dr Khoo Kah Lin the Immediate past president of the MMA and consultant cardiologist spoke on the advantages of H1N1 vaccination in cardiovascular diseases. Dr Jayakumar adequately emphasised the issues of stress among healthcare professionals performing shift work in his talk entitled, Shift Work - Torn between Night and Day. Majority of the participants stayed on to listen to the final speaker. Mr Daryl Low Yong Leong from 3M, Malaysia who spoke on the importance of donning personal protective equipment despite the hassles faced by some in doing so.

The attendance and feedback from the participants were very encouraging to ensure continuity of a similar seminar in the future. SOEM wishes to thank the Social Security Organisation and the MMA Melaka branch for their untiring support in making this event a success.

On The lighter side: Doctor to irate patient: “I know you had to sit in my waiting room for four hours, Mr. Smith... That was your stress test.”