Occupational Health Concerns of Health Care Professionals

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SOEM-MMA organised a seminar entitled Occupational Health Concerns of Health Care Professionals on 7 November 2008 at Hotel Istana, Kuala Lumpur. This event was organised in collaboration with Social Security Organisation (SOCSO).

The Society of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, MMA has been regularly conducting seminars covering the health concerns of health care professionals for the past four years mostly in Kuala Lumpur and in other states like Penang, Kuantan, Sarawak and Malacca. The seminars over the years have highlighted the health hazards and risks faced by health care professionals. Each seminar has offered new topics to update the knowledge in this field. Health care professionals have been known to indulge for long hours at work. They work around the clock and yet are expected to provide their best to the sick. In the pursuit of such dedication, health professionals face specific hazards like radiation while working at the nuclear imaging or radiology departments and psychological hazards such as stress.

One needs to have the knowledge on radiation hazards and effects before visiting radiology or nuclear imaging department to recognise the various hazards that one could be exposed too if protective and preventive measures were not in place or complied. As such, unwanted exposures usually do not reveal the negative health effects till many years of exposure. Hence, the importance of such hazards does not register an impact on health care professionals. In health care facilities, health care professionals are exposed to radiation mainly in three situations, namely diagnostic radiology, nuclear medicine and radiotherapy. The ionising effects caused by radiation lead to chemical and physical changes releasing free radicals that bring about molecular changes on DNA, RNA and enzymes. The sub cellular changes affect the cell membrane, nucleus and chromosome. The ultimate cell damage can result in either a non-

stochastic effect leading to cell death or stochastic effect causing cellular transformation. It is the stochastic effects that bring DNA changes which one is concerned about leading to malignancies and developments defects in offsprings following radiation exposures.

This other topic that caught the attention of participants was shift work. This has been one of the health care professionals’ long drawn problems. The seminar focussed on the different types of shift work and the circadian rhythm, regulated by exogenous and endogenous components of the body. Some of the health effects of shift work include gastrointestinal disorders, poorly controlled diabetes, cardiac diseases, sleep problems, weight gain, increased smoking, breast and colorectal cancer as well as pregnancy related problems namely abortions and low birth weight. Many strategies to handle shift work related problems were clearly relayed: night sleep scheduling, napping policies, creating a conducive sleeping strategy, word of caution in the use of caffeine, smoking, sleeping tablets and good dietetic habits including exercise and accompanying stress management. Instances when occupational health screening among shift workers should be instituted were clearly communicated such as diabetes, epilepsy, sleeping disorders, psychiatric disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, peptic ulcer disease and workers beyond 50 years.

The speakers who contributed for this seminar were Dr G. Jayakumar, Occupational Physician from BASF PETRONAS Chemicals, Assoc. Prof Dr Retneswari Masilamani from University Malaya, Professor Dr Ng Kwan Hoong from Department of Biomedical Imaging, University of Malaya, Dr Rozhan Shariff bin Mohamed, Radzi, Occupational Health Lecturer, Department of Community Medicine, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Dr Azlan Darus, Lecturer, Occupational & Environmental Health Unit, Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Malaya and Mr Daryl Low Yong Leong from 3M Malaysia Sdn Bhd.

This seminar was well attended. The participants were from all categories of health care professionals. They gave positive and encouraging feedbacks on the seminar. SOEM-MMA places on record, appreciation and thanks to SOCSO for their ever sustained support and contribution towards the seminar.

“Stress is the trash of modern life - we all generate it but if you don’t dispose of it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life”.

- Danzae Pace