

Bulletin

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Number One

EASOM is proud to present its first e-mail bulletin. This bulletin replaces the former Newsletter.

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by John Harrison

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More information about EASOM and the next Summer School: <http://www.easom.org>

For comments, questions and contributions to our next Bulletin, please use this web site!

EASOM NEWS: 2003

UPDATE ON PROGRESS

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

GREETINGS TO ALL EASOM MEMBERS!!

Did you know that 2003 marks the **10th anniversary of EASOM**? I wasn't around for the inaugural meeting, which was in Amsterdam, I think. However, I do remember the meeting in Berlin. There have been a lot of changes since then and we are all older (naturally) and wiser (possibly!).

I became the Newsletter Editor in 1996, after Alain Cantineau had set the ball rolling. The first newsletter was published in June 1996 and we continued to publish newsletters until February 1999. They were printed and posted to members of EASOM. At that time the board felt that we could not rely on everyone having sufficient IT to use the Internet as the sole means of distribution. For anyone interested, the newsletters can be downloaded as .pdf files from the EASOM web site (<http://www.easom.org>).

There have not been newsletters since 1999, although we did produce a single-sided leaflet in 2000, to announce the success of EASOM in obtaining funding from the European Union's **Leonardo da Vinci programme**. This project was concerned with the communication of occupational physicians with workers on health and safety issues. For those of us who were involved with this project this was a challenging experience! I now understand the meaning of the Chinese proverb "may you live in interesting times". Our contract negotiations with the Commission were protracted and at times very confusing. However, despite all this, we did manage to fulfil the terms of the contract and to produce a report that was accepted by the Commission. A number of teaching resources were produced and more information about this can be found in the final report (available from either [Prof R Masschelein](#) or Dr [André Weel](#)). In the future we will make a lot of this accessible via the EASOM web site.

The **EASOM Summer School** has become an established calendar item now. The first one was held in Dresden and came about as part of our Leonard da Vinci work. The theme was risk management, but there was also an excellent session on evidence-based practice. In July, 2002, we held the second Summer School in Newcastle upon Tyne, United

Kingdom. The theme was problem-based teaching in occupational medicine. Again, we included a session on evidence-based practice. We intend to post some of the presentations to the [web site](#), in due course.

The **third EASOM Summer School** will be held, in August 2003 at the world famous Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, ETH, in Zurich. The ETH lies in the centre of the town. Zurich is a lovely city with a medieval old town located at the end of the [Zurich lake](#) surrounded by hills well suited for leisure as well as mental activities. The theme is e-sharing. Here we will explore new electronic teaching techniques in Occupational Health.

Zurich is easy to get to. By air, come to the International Zurich Airport, which is only a 20-minute taxi ride away. A typical taxi fare is about 50.- SFr or 34 euro. Alternatively, take the clean, safe and reliable train to the Zurich Hauptbahnhof ([about 15 minutes, 6.- SFr. or 4 euro](#)). From the Hauptbahnhof you may reach the ETH by foot or by tram No 10 and 6 to the station ETH/University Hospital ([third stop](#)). With most European city's good train connection with Zurich do exist. For more information about Zurich visit: <http://www.zuerich.ch/>. A leaflet for the Summer School is being produced and more information will appear on the web site.

The **GENERAL ASSEMBLY** will take place during the Summer School. It will be necessary to elect new board members as well as a new Chairman of EASOM. Ralph Masschelein will be stepping down having served a full term of office. Nominations for any of the posts are requested and more information about this will be circulated nearer the time. If anyone has any queries about the electoral process, or wishes more information about the duties of a board member, please contact our secretary, [André Weel](#). The board have been trying to simplify and improve the EASOM constitution. The changes will be presented to the General Assembly.

BECAUSE THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT GENERAL ASSEMBLY, WE HOPE THAT AS MANY MEMBERS AS POSSIBLE WILL ATTEND.

Finally, our [web site](#). This year, we have purchased a domain name for EASOM (EASOM.ORG) and some commercial web space. (*vide supra*) We plan to develop the site for the benefit of all our members. Please visit the site, as it stands, and give us your views about how we should improve it.

10 years ago, EASOM was founded to promote the exchange of teaching information and resources. Information technology makes this a realistic proposition. It also moves us closer towards European harmonization of teaching in occupational medicine – a topic that was

addressed in a meeting of the UEMS section of occupational medicine, in a meeting held in September 2002, in Barcelona. EASOM participated in that meeting and we are keen to ensure that future teaching is appropriate and complies with the established principles of teaching.

John Harrison
June 2003.

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EASOM and The harmonisation of the postgraduate training in occupational medicine in Europe

A critical appraisal of 10 years EASOM activity

Prof. Dr. Raphaël Masschelein

**Occupational, Environmental and Insurance Medicine
K.U. Leuven, Belgium
Chairman of EASOM**

Introduction

It is almost 10 years ago, in 1993, that EASOM, the European Association of Schools of Occupational Medicine, organised her first Conference on training and education in Berlin. This seems a good reason to look back at the past ten years of EASOM activity with a special focus on the contribution of EASOM to the harmonisation of training programs for occupational medicine within Europe. First of all a short overview will be given of the organisation, the objectives and activities of EASOM. In a second part the contribution of EASOM to the harmonisation of the postgraduate training in occupational health will be discussed. Finally a critical balance will be made of the EASOM results of 10 years activity.

1. The origin and the position of EASOM

EASOM was started in the beginning of the nineties as a reaction to the important changes in the European policy in the field of occupational health and safety for workers. Inspired by the ILO Convention 161 and the ILO Recommendation 171 the European Community issued the important

Framework Directive 89/391 to improve the organisation of the measures for the safety and health of the workers. With this Framework directive new orientations were given to the employers responsibility and to the workers' commitment. More emphasis was laid on risk management and a multidisciplinary approach in the occupational health services. It was clear that the shift from the monodisciplinary occupational medical services towards multidisciplinary prevention services for occupational health and safety should also affect the role and the position of the occupational health physician.

Nearly in the same period another department of the European Union issued a directive on the harmonising of the training requirements for medical doctors as well for the basic medical training as for the specialist training. By the recommendation 89/594 and by the directive 93/16 a common requirement for the mutual recognition of specialists was set also for the specialists in occupational medicine for all the EU Member States. A 4 years full-time training after the basic medical training was set as a minimum requirement.

It was against this background that 5 Schools and Institutes for Occupational Medicine started in 1992 an initiative to form the European Association for Schools of Occupational Medicine, with a small grant from the European ERASMUS program. The initiative was also a reaction against the lack of consultation, involvement or participation from the field of occupational medicine and from the organised occupational health physicians in the preparation of these important new European regulations. On the other hand, EASOM was prepared to take the challenge to give a meaningful content to the further harmonisation of postgraduate training programs for occupational health physicians in Europe.

2. Aims and objectives

As an Association of Schools and training institutes for Occupational Medicine EASOM has focused from the start on the development and the improvement of the postgraduate training in occupational medicine. Specific objectives were formulated as:

- To promote the collaboration between the different member Schools by exchanging training programs, course ware and educational methods and experience
- To promote exchanges of teachers and students
- To promote quality assessment and quality improvement of the training programs
- To support the curriculum development and the harmonisation of the programs by defining common core competencies for occupational health physicians
- To support and to strengthen the Schools and Institutes of occupational medicine
- To promote the collaboration within the broader European region

3. The structure and organisation

After a preparatory phase EASOM was formally structured in 1994 as a non-profit organisation based on the membership of Schools and Institutes of Occupational Medicine. There are full members representing a School or Institute for occupational medicine, associated members and supporting members. The Board is elected for a period of 4 years and exists of a chairman and 8 elected members. Very soon EASOM has opened up for members of non-EU countries. EASOM has also tried to co-operate closely with related organisations as ICOH, the Scientific Committee for training and education in occupational health, The EU Commission for Employment and Social Affairs, the WHO Regional Centre for Environmental and Occupational Health, UEMS section occupational medicine, ILO, ENSOP.

4. 10 years of EASOM activities

EASOM has developed a variety of activities for the members either as a separate activity or as joint activities with other organisations, focusing on different topics in the postgraduate training in occupational medicine. Important topics were: the curriculum development, course ware exchange and development, quality assessment, required professional competencies, communication and information skills to employers and workers (within a EU-sponsored Leonardo da Vinci project), problem oriented learning and evidence based occupational medicine. Since two years EASOM has organised a Summer School as a training program for trainers in occupational medicine. A third Summer School will take place in the ETH, Zurich, August 21-23, 2003 on the concepts of e-sharing.

5. EASOM and the harmonisation of the postgraduate training in occupational medicine

From the very beginning of EASOM the harmonisation of the postgraduate training in Europe was one of the main objectives. There were several attempts to make an updated inventory of the existing postgraduate training programs in occupational medicine in Europe, but this seems to be quite difficult. It is surprising to find out such a broad variety in training programs despite the general framework set by the European regulations. The differences exist in entrance requirements, the curriculum structure and course content, the educational models and methods, the certification and the accreditation for the occupational medicine practice. In most European countries these training programs are involved in a dynamic process of changes and adaptations to cope with the evolutions both within their national occupational health and safety organisation and within the reorganisation of their educational systems. It is not clear how the different

countries deal with the mutual recognition of the specialist training programs and the accreditation of the occupational health specialists from their neighbour countries. EASOM has taken the initiative together with the UEMS section of occupational medicine and ENSOP (the former European network of societies of occupational health physicians) to define the required professional competencies for occupational health physicians. In a further step common core competencies for occupational health physicians should be defined after discussion with the other stakeholders and should then be taken as a starting point to harmonise the training programs. The further harmonisation of the training in occupational medicine will demand a step by step approach, by looking at the common goals and tasks of the occupational health physicians and by developing a more competence based curriculum. This will lead to common educational goals and objectives and training modules. EASOM must actively contribute in this process by providing a forum for active discussions, exchanges of experiences and international collaboration between the different training institutes and teachers.

6. A critical appraisal of 10 years EASOM activities

The main ambitions of EASOM were to improve the postgraduate training in occupational medicine and to contribute to the further harmonisation of the training programs within the European countries. A critical evaluation of the outcomes of the EASOM activities in the past ten years shows both positive and negative points. A SWOT analysis can be helpful to dress an overall balance of the EASOM experiences and to explore some new opportunities for the future.

Strengths

The European Union has provided a good framework both for the harmonisation of the occupational health and safety practice and for the general postgraduate training requirements.

The co-operation among the EASOM member Schools and Institutions until now has been helpful for curriculum development and quality assessment and improvement.

EASOM has played a central role in the discussion about required and core professional competencies.

EASOM has opened for non-EU members.

Weaknesses

EASOM covers only a limited number of members among the Schools and Institutes in the different European countries, which limits the available resources and actions.

It remains difficult to obtain reliable and updated information on the postgraduate training programs and the occupational health and safety practice in the different countries.

EASOM focuses on monodisciplinary training programs for occupational health physicians who work in multidisciplinary prevention services.

Due to national regulations and social and economical developments there are still important differences in training programs and quality requirements.

Opportunities

There are new developments in the organised occupational health and safety which ask for new professional competencies for the occupational health physicians and for the training programs.

There are interesting developments in the educational world such as quality assessment, new educational methods, evidence based occupational medicine.

Possibilities for student and teacher mobility should be further developed also with the East-European countries.

Threats

Weakening of the position of occupational health physicians in the multidisciplinary prevention services.

There are increasing tensions on the market for occupational health physicians.

The position of Schools and Institutions for occupational medicine is threatened in some countries due to lack of support or lack of resources.

An overview of 10 years EASOM activities

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| AMSTERDAM 1992 | Preparatory meeting Erasmus program |
| BERLIN 1993 | First EASOM Conference on training in occupational medicine |
| AMSTERDAM 1994 | 4 th ICOH Conference on Training and Education in Occupational Health |
| MODENA 1995 | Panel discussion on training and education in occupational medicine |
| GLASGOW 1995 | Participation in the ICOH Conference on Health Services Research and Evaluation in Occupational Health |
| STOCKHOLM 1996 | Participation in the XXV ICOH Conference. Evaluation of training programs in occupational medicine |
| TURKU 1996 | Participation in WHO consultation on the role of occupational health physicians in work place health promotion |
| GLASGOW 1997 | Joint Workshop on required competencies of occupational health physicians |
| LINZ 1998 | Quality assessment of training programs in occupational medicine |
| AMSTERDAM 2000 | Organisation of the Leonardo da Vinci program on communication to workers |
| DRESDEN 2001 | First EASOM Summer School on Communication of Occupational Health Physicians to workers on health issues |
| NEWCASTLE 2002 | Second EASOM Summer School on Problem Based Learning and Evidence based Occupational Medicine |
| ZURICH 2003 | Third EASOM Summer School on Concepts of E-sharing |