

Online resources for occupational health physicians

Abstract

Periodic *retraining* ensures that experts are updated in the advances in the science and methods of their profession. Such periodic retraining is sparsely accessible to Indian occupational health physicians and researchers. However, there is significant material that is available online in occupational health and related fields. This information is open-source and is freely available. It does not require any special subscription on the client's part. This information can supplement the efforts of motivated occupational health practitioners in India.

Key words: Education, online resources, training

INTRODUCTION

"No one can get an education, for of necessity education is a continuing process." These words by Louis L'Amour extol the need for continuously updating ones' learning. This applies particularly to physicians who are entrusted by society to provide the best available treatment to the patients in their care. This periodic updating of knowledge is relevant for occupational health physicians as well. The current training courses in occupational health (OH) are striving to become *knowledge-driven*. Irrespective of the success of these training courses in adopting a knowledge-driven approach during participant training, there is little change in the subsequent knowledge-gathering after course completion. Training programs are seen as a one-way ticket to getting a successful license for employment. This needs urgent attention in the field of OH in the light of constant advancement in the art and science of the subject. In the relative paucity of formal *continuing medical education* programs, the onus of keeping abreast of current knowledge has become an individual initiative. This paper includes a brief overview of online resources for occupational health physicians practicing in India. Accessing the online resources available in these sites will be a significant step in the right direction by motivated occupational health physicians.

LIST OF WEBSITES WITH A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

Website: www.cdc.gov/niosh

This is the official website of The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)^[1] Washington, DC, which is an agency conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related injury and illness. NIOSH conducts scientific research, develops guidance and authoritative recommendations, disseminates information, and responds to requests for workplace health hazard evaluations. In 1996, NIOSH launched National Occupational Research Agenda, an innovative public-private partnership to establish priorities for occupational safety and health research. The website provides information about workplace safety and health topics such as *industries and occupations, diseases and injuries, safety and prevention, hazards and exposures, and emergency preparedness and response*.

Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health

Website: www.coeh.delhigovt.nic.in

The Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health^[2] at LokNayak Hospital has been set up in 1998. The scientific activities carried out by the Centre of Occupational and Environmental Health principally focuses on environmental assessment and control of hazards causing disease. The web page provides linkages to Bulletin of Occupational and Environmental Health and publications of the centre.

Directorate General, Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes

Website: www.dgfasli.nic.in

A web link of Ministry of Labour and

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Employments guides users to the Central Labour Institute through which the Ministry undertakes most of its research on occupational health and safety and the implementation of various legislations.^[3] The core research area is industrial safety and health. The institute also tests and develops personal protective equipments. Certificate courses on industrial safety and industrial health are a rich resource for occupational health physicians to enrich and update their existing knowledge. The INDOSHNET and INDOSHNEWS are two useful resources for information on International Occupational Safety and Health Information Center (CIS), Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS), and other events and development in the area of industrial safety in India.

Indian Association of Occupational Health

Website: www.iaohindia.com

Indian Association of Occupational Health^[4], started in 1948, has a membership of more than 2 000 members; most of them are industrial physicians, medical teachers, and research workers. Since its inception, the association is holding annual national conferences periodic and international meetings. These meetings help in increasing awareness among owners about safe workplace and healthy workforce as well as the legislative aspects of having appropriate occupational health services. The website provides a link to the International Commission on Occupational Health and the journal of the Association, i.e., Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

The International Commission on Occupational Health

Website: www.icohweb.org

The International Commission on Occupational Health^[5] (ICOH) is an international nongovernmental professional society whose aims are to foster the scientific progress, knowledge, and development of occupational health and safety in all its aspects. It was founded in 1906 in Milan as the *Permanent Commission on Occupational Health*. Today, ICOH is the world's leading international scientific society in the field of occupational health with a membership of 2000 professionals from 93 countries.

The priority areas for its functioning include the permanent training and education of experts in order to face the rapidly changing world of work, the need to develop occupational health services throughout the world (including the development and dissemination of basic occupational health services-BOHS), and the mainstreaming of BOHS activities. The mainstreaming activities include creation of BOHS guidelines, tools, training, and pilot projects and the intention of making a global survey on the OHS situation in ICOH member countries, and cooperation with other agencies such as World Health Organization (WHO), International Labor Organization (ILO), and other NGO partners

are some of the priority areas of ICOH. The publication page gives the details of the books published by ICOH, while the report page provides details about the scientific committees, financial committees, and task group reports.

Indian Institute of Toxicology Research

Website: www.iitrindia.org

Indian Institute of Toxicology Research^[6] (IITR) (formerly: Industrial Toxicology Research Centre), Lucknow, a constituent laboratory of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, was established in 1965. IITR undertakes research in niche areas of toxicology. These include the impact of industrial and environmental chemicals on human health and ecosystem, and environmental monitoring of pollutants in air, water, and soil. The institute also assists Indian regulatory bodies to formulate/amend guidelines for safe use of chemicals/products. The motto of the center is "Safety to Environment and Health and Service to Industry." The research tab of the homepage guides a visitor to the projects, publication, patents, technologies, facilities, and laboratories of the institute.

All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health

Website: www.irc.ni/page/6624

The objectives of the All India Institute of Hygiene And Public Health^[7] are to develop health manpower by providing postgraduate training facilities; to conduct research relating to various health problems and disease in the community; to provide the support services in urban (slum) and rural areas; and to support and guide various programs at National level. The physiological and industrial hygiene department conducts regular courses on industrial health.

National Institute of Miners' Health

Website: www.nimh.gov.in

National Institute of Miners' Health^[8] was established as a registered society on February 21, 1990 with the twin objectives of promoting the highest possible degree of occupational health and hygiene in the mining industry and to develop human resource in the field of occupational health of miners. For achieving the objectives, in 2002, the institute has been shifted to Nagpur, a place surrounded by coal, manganese, iron, and limestone mines.

National institute of Occupational Health

Website: www.nioh.org

Established in 1966, the National institute of Occupational Health^[9], Ahmedabad, is an important institute working in the field of occupational and environmental health. The institute actively contributes to the manpower development through the *Certificate in Industrial Health* course and short-term training programs for industrial medical officers, industrial

hygienists, factory inspectors, workers, and trade unions. The annual reports published from the institute and the research publications in journals constitute a rich resource on the relevant aspects of occupational health and safety. These annual reports and the publications can be viewed on this website.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

Website: www.osha.gov

The United States Occupational Safety and Health Administration^[40] is an agency of the United States Department of Labor. It was created by the US Congress under the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Its mission is to prevent work-related injuries, illnesses, and occupational fatality by issuing and enforcing standards for workplace safety and health. The website provides important information regarding regulations and standards for workplace environment and the permissible levels of harmful substances.

Society for Participatory Research in Asia

Website: www.pria.org

Society for Participatory Research in Asia^[41] (PRIA) is an international center for learning and promotion of participation and democratic governance. Since its inception in 1982, PRIA has embarked on a set of key initiatives focusing on participatory research, citizen-centric development, capacity building, knowledge building, and policy advocacy. With a combination of training, research, and consultancy, it has grounded its work with conceptual rigour and understanding of social reality to command the strategic direction of interventions. PRIA works with a diverse range of partners at the local, national, and global levels. The publication tab of the website is hyper linked to the different published materials such as audiovisuals, books on Occupational Health and Safety, and reports.

Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Research Institute

Website: www.srmc.edu

The Department of Environmental Health at Sri Ramachandra Medical College and Research Institute^[42], Chennai, carries out studies of job exposure profile through industrial hygiene surveys in large- and medium-scale industries like leather tanneries, textile, automobile industry, etc., in southern India. This department also runs short-term and degree courses in occupational health and industrial hygiene and safety. It has recently initiated the first Indian Masters in Public Health (MPH) program in occupational and environmental health.

DISCUSSION

A large-scale industrialization and foreign investment have accompanied globalization in India. Rapid industrialization, intense competition in international trade, and workforce-

health concerns have mandated industries to conform to international standards in occupational health, environment, and safety. These standards not only hold importance from a legal dimension, but also increase productivity through the creation of a healthy work force. The adoption of international standards in occupational health, environment, and safety require a well-trained cadre of occupational health physicians. The current wide gap in the supply and demand for the provision of occupational health training can be overcome by up-scaling the skill-sets in the first phase. Another alternative is to provide regular orientation to the existing manpower to recent developments in occupational health and safety. The resources for undertaking these activities can be offline or online. The offline resources can include short-term courses and degree courses pertaining to OSH, leading to the acquisition of a university degree. They also include access to a wide gamut of national and international journals. In contrast to these offline resources, the internet is rich resource providing access to updated information.

The online sources of information outlined in this article are in the open-access. Easy financial access is vital in resource-poor countries like India; these websites do not require any institutional subscription or subscription payments. Consequently, we expect that these will be a valuable addition to the regular readings of an occupational health physician.

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