

## **Society of Occupational Medicine welcomes its first nurse President**

**24<sup>th</sup> June: The Society of Occupational Medicine today welcomed its first nurse President, Professor Anne Harriss.**

Professor Anne Harriss succeeds Dr Will Ponsonby as President at the SOM AGM, today. This follows a year as President Elect. Professor Harriss is the first non-physician and first nurse to serve as SOM President.

Professor Anne Harriss said: *“A focus of my role will be ensuring that Government and business understand the role of occupational health and asking for universal access to it. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance to the economy and public health of effectively supporting workplace health.”*

SOM CEO Nick Pahl said: *“There is [a strong economic case](#) to implement access to occupational health for all employers. Occupational health services are key in supporting employees back to work and keeping them in work safely during these challenging times. Anne brings a wealth of experience to highlight the vital role occupational health plays”.*

Professor Harriss trained as a nurse at St Thomas’ Hospital London and then at the Royal College of Nursing. Professor Harriss completed an MSc in Occupational Health at the University of Surrey. With varied practice experience, including working for a major chain of hotels, oil and gas industry, the pharmaceutical industry and her own consultancy, a significant part of Professor Harriss’ career has been spent in education.

Passionate in ensuring that education is fit for both purpose and practice, Professor Harriss has been course director for occupational health (OH) nursing programmes at the Royal College of Nursing and London South Bank University, where she was course director for programmes in both OH nursing and OH health and safety.

Professor Harriss was awarded Fellowship of the Royal College of Nursing and Honorary Fellowship of the Faculty of Occupational Medicine. Recipient of a National Teaching Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in 2014, Professor Harriss became the first person in the Faculty of Health at London South Bank University to become a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy in 2015.

In addition to her “day job”, Professor Harriss has been involved for over 18 years in developing, leading and delivering pro-bono public health projects in rural South Africa, and over the last two years has undertaken projects with the New Zealand Association of Occupational Health Nurses.

During the COVID-19 crisis, Professor Harriss has delivered SOM webinars, some in association with organisations such as Acas, CIPD and Mind, and has helped to develop the SOM [Return to Work toolkits](#), which have been designed to help managers and occupational health professionals get workers back to work safely post-lockdown.

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## Notes for editors

### **About The Society of Occupational Medicine:**

The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) is a multi-disciplinary professional society whose membership includes over 1,700 OH doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and technicians. SOM Patrons are Lord Blunkett, Dame Carol Black, and Sir Norman Lamb.

SOM was founded in 1935 as the Association of Industrial Medical Officers and changed its name to become The Society of Occupational Medicine in 1965. In 2012, SOM opened its membership to all health professionals working in occupational health (OH). Since then SOM's membership has grown to include OH nurses, technicians, physiotherapists, psychologists, and other OH professionals.

### **About occupational health:**

Occupational health (OH) helps people of working age access and stay in appropriate work and live full and healthy working lives despite underlying disabilities or health conditions. Occupational clinicians help employers reduce sickness absence and increase productivity by providing advice on best practice and how to comply with legal duties such as the Equality Act 2010 and Health and Safety legislation. They advise on fitness for work, return to work programmes, workplace adjustments to enable people with health conditions to return to/remain at work, suitable alternative work, and early retirement on ill health grounds.

Occupational clinicians interpret the instructions of the government and Public Health agencies and the most up-to-date clinical evidence to support businesses in keeping their workforce well. They use their combination of clinical expertise and deep understanding of how health affects work to empower managers and employers to make the right decisions, at the right time, to ensure the health both of their employees and their businesses e.g. what employers should do when workers are pregnant and what steps managers should take with their older and more vulnerable employees.

The need for robust and increasing OH services in many sectors has been highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis. The need for advice from occupational health doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, psychologists, hygienists, ergonomists etc. on all aspect of business policy, the adequacy of control and how to protect our workers continuing to face the public has never been greater, and is the core role of OH.

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