

OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE IN BRAZIL

What work takes place in your country?

The proportion of workers in service industries practically tripled from the 1940s to the 1990s while the proportion in manufacturing declined. The most important manufacturing industries are petroleum, petrochemical, steel and textile. Although the primary industries are in decline, they still represent a significant segment of the working population. As a result of the unemployment that followed the economic development and uncontrolled capitalism of the 1990s, the number of informal workers has risen considerably and raises concerns over workers' safety and health.

What are the key occupational diseases?

The most common occupational health (OH) problem is musculoskeletal disorders followed by mental health disorders. In the third place is hearing disorders. Asbestos is not banned in Brazil, which is one of the five worlds' largest producers and consumers of the mineral. This issue is the subject of many debates.

How is occupational health provided?

In Brazil, workers' health care is provided by government through a network of 150 Referral Centres for Workers' Health and OH sentinel services. Although the government has been hiring an increased number of OH professionals for this public system, many OH practitioners are employed by large and medium-sized companies. The Social Service Industry is a Brazilian private institution that provides OH services to the manufacturing and construction sectors throughout Brazil. Despite these institutions, many workers are not covered by any OH service.

Who provides the services?

Although there are >10 000 specialists in occupational medicine (OM) in Brazil, this is not enough to meet the country's needs. Since 2002, to become an OM specialist, the physician undertakes a 2-year residency programme offered by one of 10 academic centres. Most of these programmes train practitioners to have competencies not only in the technical and clinical aspects of this speciality but also in the social dimensions of OM. The programmes incorporate training in ethics, population health and epidemiology in addition to occupational clinic practice of individual patients.

How is OH represented?

The 40-year-old National Association of Occupational Medicine has >5000 members and organizes scientific meetings. Many researchers and academic professors are represented by the Brazilian Association of Collective Health.

What legislation do you have that impacts on the provision of OH?

Until 1988, Brazilians' health care services were only obtained through social welfare, private assistance or philanthropic hospitals. In 1988, it became a 'right of all and a State obligation'. The Organic Law of Health regulates workers' health in Brazil. Since 2004, the National Work Safety and Health Policy of the Ministry of Health has organized the workers' health network. Approved in 1978, the Regulatory Standards (*Normas Regulamentadoras*), known as NRs, regulate and provide direction for mandatory procedures related to occupational safety and health in Brazil. As appendices of the Consolidation of Labour Laws, the NRs state which OH services employers must provide.

What about research and education?

In the past 15 years, there has been an exponential growth of research, the majority addressing key public health issues. This increase has been attributed to the growth of graduate public health and OM residency programmes.

What has your country contributed to the advancement of the speciality?

Many Brazilian research studies are disseminated through presentations at scientific and professional conferences and through scientific publications. From the legal point of view, workers have won various rights such as workers' participation in occupational safety and health matters assured by Law no. 6514/77. The Jorge Duprat Figueiredo Foundation of Occupational Safety and Health (FUNDACENTRO) is the Brazilian version of NIOSH in the USA. There is a National Work Safety and Health Network (RENAST) that works to guarantee workers' access to public health care. National statistics on workers' health are provided by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics and the National Institute of Social Security, which are important sources of research. In the last decade, there has been an increasing movement to consolidate the national health information system of the Ministry of Health, which collects information on the occupational health of formal and informal workers.

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our gratitude to Dr Susan Stock who helped us to complete this article.

**Fernanda Leite Lima and
Rita de Cássia Pereira Fernandes**

*Universidade Federal da Bahia, Departamento de Medicina Preventiva e Social, Rua Machado Neto, nº 223, Ap. 1403, Pituba, CEP 41830-510, Bahia, Salvador, Brasil
e-mail: flima.br@gmail.com*