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Welcome to the WOEMA WINDOW. This e-newsletter is sent to members by email on a monthly basis. The e-newsletter provides links to this page. Below are the items that appeared in the April 2021 issue.

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Letter from the President

Scott A. Krasner, MD, MPH, FACOEM

As we continue to work under the conditions of the pandemic, I can easily understand how you may be experiencing some despair. Our lives and businesses have been placed on hold for such a long time that you feel alone, that this is the end of professional organizations. But just as Mark Twain once said, "The report of my death has been greatly exaggerated," I am pleased to announce that WOEMA has not succumbed to this despair, rather we are alive and working hard.

In the past three months we are meeting our goals of rededication and rejuvenation. All of our committees are active. We have been reviewing our bylaws with changes to reflect our everchanging field. We have established a new committee on Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) to embrace how our prosperity is enhanced with our differences, not hindered. And of course, we are on track to resume our on-site WOHC 2021 Conference, to be held in Phoenix Arizona September 27-October 2, 2021, with a wide range of activities including plenary sessions, post-graduate courses, work-site visit and social events. I encourage all to register and join us.

Yes, WOEMA is alive and busy. But what is WOEMA? It is not any single organism... it is you. WOEMA is alive because you make it alive; you take an active role in participating on committees, webinars, podcasts, and all else that we offer. And most importantly, WOEMA is alive because you care. I encourage you to contact the WOEMA office and ask how you can help.

Yes, WOEMA is alive because of you. We will rise out from the depths of despair and loneliness and continue to be in the forefront of occupational and environmental medicine. See you at WOHC 2021!

JEDI Focus

The WOEMA JEDI (Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion) Committee conducted a survey of membership in October-December 2020 to assess diversity. We sincerely appreciate the 85 members (out of 510 WOEMA members) who took time to respond to this important survey. The response rate of 17% of total membership, while low, is consistent with similar surveys conducted by other organizations. Some of the highlights from the 85 respondents are summarized below:

- Five respondents stated that they experienced any form of discrimination at WOEMA, while 26 admitted to experiencing discrimination elsewhere in the workplace/academia/professional organizations. There are opportunities for improvement, but it appears that WOEMA is creating a relatively safe environment to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- When asked "On a scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important) how important is the issue of DEI to you personally?" 71 respondents (83%) reported 3 or higher, indicating this is a vitally important topic
- For the question "On a scale from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (extremely interested) how interested are you in seeing WOEMA adopt or promote DEI initiatives?" 67 respondents (79%) reported 3 or higher, indicating there is strong support within WOEMA for promoting DEI initiatives.
- There was an inspiring array of suggestions for the best format(s) to engage the WOEMA community on JEDI issues, some of the top suggestions included webinars, podcasts, CME/plenary sessions, and small group discussions.

The WOEMA Member Survey is an important first step in benchmarking and understanding views within our community, we will continue to strive to provide meaningful information and data to members on these critically important topics and issues. We will be sharing additional details about the results of the survey in the near future.

Legislative Committee Update

WOEMA Leg Comm Wrestles With New QME Fee Schedule

California's adoption of a new fee schedule for Qualified Medical Examiners, a challenging effort from the start, remains high on the list of topics for WOEMA's Legislative Committee this spring.

On the face of it, the fees that went into effect April 1 represent a nice increase for QMEs, and they may indeed encourage more Occ Med and other physicians to take on the work. The hourly fee structure, with rates unchanged since 2006, has been replaced by a flat rate of \$2,015 for a comprehensive med-legal evaluation plus \$3 per page for review of records beyond 200 pages.

But WOEMA's Legislative Committee, whose members include primary treatment physicians and specialists as well as medical directors for carriers and MPNs, remain vexed that the new schedule does nothing to improve report quality. A 2019 state audit to investigate the diminishing number of QMEs specifically charged the Division of Workers' Compensation to boost fees, improve the QME disciplinary process, and improve report quality. Indeed, DWC convened a working group specifically to address quality although nothing has materialized from that effort. For those reasons, WOEMA this year informed DWC it could not endorse a fee scheduled not linked to quality improvement.

This month, a subgroup of the Legislative Committee including doctors Chang Na, Paul Papanek, David Caretto, Steve Feinberg, Bob Blink and lobbyist Don Schinske will begin discussing how WOEMA should pursue quality improvement in QME reports, and improvements in clinical quality in the Workers Compensation system as a whole. Out of the discussions may come formal recommendations for WOEMA to seek statutory or regulatory changes. We will keep members posted as that work unfolds.

WOEMA is fortunate to have an expert on QME issues, Dr. Feinberg, to spur and inform the committee's discussions. In April, he paired with DWC Administrative Director George Parisotto on two packed-to-capacity webinars about the new QME schedule. The new regulations can be [viewed here](#).

Member Spotlight

Bernyce Peplowski, DO MS FACOEM



The well-known architect, Frank Lloyd Wright once said, "...the thing always happens that you really believe in; and the belief in a thing makes it happen..." which aptly describes Bernyce Peplowski, DO MS FACOEM. Her storied career is one molded by patience, perseverance, and change and has undoubtedly influenced her tremendous contributions to WOEMA, ACOEM, and our field of occupational and environmental medicine.

Growing up as an introverted and only child in Rankin, PA, a small industrial town noted for having a one-lane cobblestone street located just outside of Pittsburgh, she was close to her parents and Croatian grandmother and that bond influenced her curiosity, drive, and passion with which she approaches occupational medicine. She recalled that her grandmother was wearily cognizant of the hazardous emissions from the steel mills in town and would quickly bring down the clothes hanging on the clothesline and closing windows when the emissions were high. Looking back at these simple protective measures undoubtedly preserved the health of Peplowski clan compared to the general township. And yet her father's passing at the age of 45 further ignited the drive and determination. She states that he was a very healthy person with no underlying medical conditions when he took on an administrative position at a nuclear-powered submarine construction plant; however, she also remembers that her father's

work-space was closest to the “pit.” It wasn’t long before he began to develop “nodules on his arms.” She went on to say that he came home one day with a fever and was diagnosed with pneumonia, prompting the family to suspect work-related exposures. But the family was never informed to what he was exposed nor was there further investigation by the medical establishment regarding his death. More than half of her father’s co-workers met a similar fate before the plant closed. That was 1966, preceding OSHA (1972).

Bernyce, however, would tell you that becoming a doctor was not her first choice. She always thought that she would become an architect. However, as a sophomore in high school, she noticed that it was easier to visualize and draw a dissected frog from memory than it was to draw a building. This self-realization and her strength in science and mathematics solidified her belief that medicine is what she would pursue. Earning a scholarship to attend Duquesne University in Philadelphia as a pre-med student, she excelled and was accepted to various allopathic medical schools, including Temple University’s Medical School. However, she was more interested in an osteopathic school for their holistic approach to medicine, and attended Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, graduating in 1980. Choosing to leave the cold weather behind, Bernyce went to USC - LA County for a family medicine residency. Her hard work and determination came at the expense of poor nutrition resulting in weight gain and the development of high blood pressure and hypercholesterolemia - 325 at the age of 25. Again, she realized the problem and took up power walking as the solution. Since 1981, she continues to power walk 6-15 miles a day, walking a 15 to 20 min mile.

Fresh out of residency, Bernyce accepted a position with Lockheed Martin (1982) in Burbank, CA. where she performed workers’ compensation and urgent care at the work site. At the same time, she obtained her Masters of Science from USC North Ridge, in Occupational and Environmental Health, where she participated in classes alongside Industrial Hygiene students and learned the science behind monitoring and surveillance, such as toxicology. With Lockheed-Martin moving to Georgia and Palmdale, she began her own private practice in Oceanside, CA. However, she longed for bigger projects with an organization and joined Kaiser Permanente (KP) in Jan 1994, where KP was starting “On the Job” pilot and assimilated as part of the team and started the KP Southern California division, relocating to San Diego to become the regional director of KP SoCal. Her time with KP allowed her to be able to grow both as a clinician “with those Saturday Neurology CMEs” and as a physician leader, learning how to set up the infrastructure upon which organizations like KP are built. After KP, she became medical director of Zenith in 2006, learning the unique structure of a WC insurance company and how it integrated with clinicians. She then moved on to work for State Compensation Insurance Fund (2011-2012), bringing her full circle, whereby the company’s history and mission and were remarkably similar to Permanente. Following her work with US Health Works (2012) as Chief Innovation Officer, she left the corporate world and moved to Hawaii to do more consulting work. She quickly fell in love with Hawaii, where she had previously travelled annually to obtain CME while working for KP. To Bernyce, Hawaii felt like home from day one. Recently she has immersed herself into built environments (sustainable and healthy live-work-play) and culinary medicine (especially with the tropical cuisine centered on bounties of the sea, such as seaweed and octopus and preserving the land). She has rekindled her initial love for architecture and is currently planning and building her Hale Nalu (wave house) on the slopes of Diamond Head.

Bernyce’s passion for life could best be summed up with the words she best identifies with, Ikigai, which means “purpose” as in having a purpose in life and Bonsai, meaning “live long” and “prosper’ (spiritually) and charging forward.” As symbolized by her stellar career, she has always pushed forward and made her presence known, from the exemplary scholar from Rankin, PA to the CIO from the corporate world and now as the leading proponents of culinary medicine. Dr. Bernyce Peplowski has certainly epitomized Wright’s quote of “belief makes it happen” through her unflinching belief in herself coupled with patience, perseverance and change.

In Memoriam Nyla Medlock

1955 - 2021



It is with heavy hearts that we share the recent news of the sudden passing of a treasured member of our WOEMA family, Nyla Medlock. She was the founder and CEO of Medlock Consulting, an international occupational and environmental health recruitment firm. She started her OEM journey in San Diego 30 years ago. Although she moved back to Lubbock, Texas to assist in caring for her parents, our Western states remained home to her.

Nyla played an integral role in many of our careers and was a friend and sounding board as well as a recruiter. She had the gift of connecting dots before others could see them. She remained an avid supporter of our residents and WOHC throughout the years and during challenging economic times.

May we all honor her by doing more for each other and our communities. She will be the wind beneath our WOEMA wings forever.

Residents Corner

WOEMA is launching a Residents Corner!

We would like to have residents submit articles for consideration to publish in the WOEMA newsletter. The subject matter could be about your research projects, anything about OEM, training, and your experiences after graduation. Graduating residents, let us hear from you about your reflections on your training and experience with WOEMA. Pictures would be great too!

Send your articles and other content to woema@woema.org.

In addition, we are establishing a WOEMA community forum that will also include a Residents Section. It will be a great place to share your experiences, your de-identified cases, enlist help from WOEMA mentors, and other questions you have about occupational and environmental medicine. This forum will be open in May - so look out for the announcement soon!

WOEMA is a regional component of the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) and is dedicated to high-quality medical care and ethical principles governing the practice of occupational medicine.

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