



WOEMA PRESIDENT'S FINAL REPORT

Dear WOEMA Members and Colleagues,

As I conclude my tenure as your President, I'm proud to reflect on the advances we've made together.



We now celebrate the recent addition of Colorado and New Mexico to WOEMA's states, broadening our geographic reach and reinforcing our organizational unity. In recognition of this growth, the WOEMA Logo Task Force, led by Dr. Scott Krasner, is currently updating our logo. Expect a fresh, modern design that honors our rich heritage while embracing our expanding and inclusive community.

Mark your calendars for WOHC 2025 in Salt Lake City. Building on the exceptional programming planned for WOHC 2024, the Salt Lake City conference promises dynamic speakers, cutting-edge education, and valuable networking opportunities. Stay tuned for more details—this is an event you won't want to miss.

On the regulatory front, we're witnessing landmark changes shaping the future of occupational health. Cal/OSHA's updated lead standard, approved earlier this year and set to take effect on January 1, 2025, significantly lowers permissible exposure limits, further safeguarding the health of workers across multiple industries. In addition, the Cal/OSHA Standards Board will convene on December 19 to consider making the Silica Emergency Temporary Standard permanent. WOEMA's Silicosis Task Force will be actively involved, with members attending and calling in to offer prepared comments. Recently reported cases of silica-related illness have risen to 230—more than double the previous count—highlighting the pressing need for these protections.





One of the significant challenges we face is the shortage of OEM physicians. WOEMA has been tirelessly working to raise awareness and address this concern. The Legislative Committee, led by Dr. Paul Papanek, has prepared a WOEMA Position Paper and Call to Action, California Urgently Needs More Physicians Specializing in Occupational and Environmental Medicine (OEM), which has been submitted to the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (JOEM) for publication. This article underscores the importance of increased residency funding and expanding the number of OEM residents, ensuring a robust pipeline of specialists ready to meet the evolving needs of our workforce.

As we celebrate these advancements, we also recognize the importance of leadership transitions. With great pride, I have recently passed the gavel to Dr. Banasiak, who will guide WOEMA forward with vision, dedication, and a deep commitment to our mission. Under this new leadership, I am confident that WOEMA will continue to thrive, innovate, and positively impact the health and well-being of the workforce.

As the holiday season approaches, I wish you and your families joy, peace, and prosperity in the coming year. It has been an honor to serve as your President, and I remain certain that WOEMA's best days lie ahead. Thank you for your unwavering support, engagement, and the remarkable work you do every day.

Warmest regards,

Akbar Sharip
President, WOEMA

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LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE FOR WOEMA WINDOW: LOOK BACK AT 2024

As we look back at a very interesting year 2024, the WOEMA Legislative Committee members have consistently stepped up to the plate and shown up when it matters most. This group has used this platform to raise important occupational and environmental health issues to the forefront, using its collective wisdom to advocate for evidence-based policy change. The camaraderie has helped to propel the Legislative Committee to new heights, advancing group goals and team projects. What has made the Legislative Committee successful has been its commitment to action. The Committee leadership has developed an effective communications strategy to engage and activate members, fostering a spirit of collaboration. This methodology has contributed greatly to our team's success. Even when we had difference of opinions, we came together as a united front.

The legislative committee has been active in various areas.

One of the leading topics for this past year has been protecting workers from the hazards of working with engineered stone. An Emergency Temporary Standard for Silica in California was adopted unanimously by CalOSHA to which this committee contributed significantly. This temporary standard is expected to be adopted as permanent in late 2024 with the support of this committee. A Silicosis Bill in collaboration with a California assemblymember moved forward in the legislative circles. It will be updated for the upcoming legislative period in 2025. Further, our goal is to extend efforts to the rest of WOEMA states for initiating a similar process for Silica regulation.

Another legislative achievement for 2024 was systematic improvements to the outdated Lead Standards in California to better protect workers and their families. Following a position paper from our committee that advocated support for a new Lead Standard, CalOSHA adopted changes to the 45 year old Lead Standards. This update is expected to not only improve the health of workers, but also their families, especially small children, through the effects of "take-home lead".

A project lovingly called "OEM Residency Pipeline" has grown into a detailed WOEMA position paper that was approved by the WOEMA Board and Executive Committee. In a joint collaboration with the OEM residency program directors as well as some of our committee members, the author leads WOEMA president Dr. Akbar Sharip and Dr. Paul Papanek have articulated eloquently the need for more OEM residency spots as well as specific costs to implement these changes.


Promoting quality in workers compensation injury care has been a priority to our committee. We strive to remove barriers and streamline processes in the system. An excellent guidance document for PR-4 report writing has been published by Committee member Dr. Steven Feinberg. This is accompanied by a recommendation to substantially increase reimbursement for these reports. A report writing workshop was conducted at WOHC 2024 to train OEM physicians on how to write quality reports.

Updates to tuberculosis screening requirements and LTBI treatment for healthcare workers are currently drafted by experts in the Legislative Committee. This much needed overhaul is expected to save providers valuable time as well as cut unnecessary cost in the healthcare system. A bill is likely to be ready for the next legislative period.

Members of this committee have been actively representing and accelerating WOEMA's interest within ACOEM, CMA, and AMA. WOEMA remains a source of guidance and inspiration.

The Legislative Committee has dynamic and lively virtual meetings every Friday attended by many experienced WOEMA leaders who mentor and help navigate other attendees through the process of integrating medicine into policy. If interested in playing a role in the future of occupational medicine in WOEMA states, please send an email to woema@woema.org, and a link to the zoom meetings will be provided.

Looking forward to another exciting legislative year in 2025.



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WOEMA EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

As 2024 approaches, the WOEMA Education Committee is reflecting on a successful year of providing high-quality occupational and environmental medicine content to our members and the wider community through our webinar series. We are excited to share the enriching program we have planned for 2025.

Since the last update from the WOEMA Education Committee in June, we were fortunate to have Dr. Yusef Sayeed present on "Recent Advances in Managing Spine Injuries in Occupational Medicine." Dr. Sayeed focused on best practices for treating both common and uncommon spinal pathologies, as well as important diagnostic findings, imaging techniques, and approaches to functional interventions.

In July, Drs. Christian Sandrock and Carol Cardona co-presented a session on "H5N1 Influenza." They discussed which species can be infected with H5N1 influenza, its modes of transmission,

and the level of risk it poses to humans. The doctors provided attendees with crucial information on how individuals at risk of H5N1 infection can protect themselves, especially through the utilization of vaccines and personal protective equipment (PPE). Additionally, they covered how to treat individuals who have been exposed to the virus with post-exposure prophylaxis, as well as how to address symptoms in those who are infected.

Dr. Amy Khan, Pfizer's Medical Director of Vaccines, hosted our August webinar titled "CDC and ACIP Guidelines for Vaccine-Preventable Respiratory Communicable Diseases: Values and Advantages of Vaccination" (non-CME). The webinar addressed the burden of vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases among adults in the US, as well as the challenges and best practices in adult vaccination. Additionally, it covered the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations for select respiratory vaccines.

In our September webinar, Dr. Aisha Chaudhry, Chair of the WOEMA Education Committee, presented on the topic of "Lifestyle Medicine." She emphasized the importance of good nutrition, weight loss, and longevity. Attendees gained insights into effective communication strategies for discussing the significance of nutrition with patients and supporting their efforts to lead healthier lifestyles.

In October, we had the privilege of welcoming Dr. Yusef Sayeed back to present on "Joint Steroid Injections for Common Occupational Medicine Conditions." Dr. Sayeed provided valuable insights into the use of joint injections for pain relief, improving mobility, and reducing inflammation. He discussed the potential risks and side effects of corticosteroid joint injections and the advantages of incorporating musculoskeletal injections into practice.

In our November webinar, Dr. Paul Papanek delivered an engaging presentation on the "CAL/OSHA Lead Standard." He updated attendees on the new, stricter requirements that will take effect on January 1, 2025. Dr. Papanek explained the changes in the lead standards, including a more protective Action Level and Permissible Exposure Limit. He also discussed "trigger tasks" and other measures aimed at protecting workers who were not covered under the previous standard.

Our most recent webinar was "Avian Influenza (H5N1) for Healthcare Professionals presented by Dr. Alya Khan along with Drs. Jacqueline Denning, Chloe LeMarchand, and Cara Drehoff. This webinar from the California Department of Public Health provided the audience with critical knowledge about Avian Influenza (H5N1), focusing on the current outbreak in California.

Dr. Christian Sandrock will host a second webinar at the end of December focused on flu, RSV, and COVID-19. As multiple viruses are circulating in the United States, this webinar will offer essential, timely information regarding key clinical symptoms and best practices for managing and treating these illnesses.

As part of our WOEMA webinar series, the Education Committee has introduced a new feature called "Link and Learn." This informal session, lasting 20 to 30 minutes (non-CME), takes place after the main webinar and allows attendees and speakers to discuss the content in more detail. Participants can share insights via chat, and speakers or the moderator may invite individuals to join the discussion verbally. The "Link and Learn" format has been positively received by both attendees and presenters!

As we look ahead to 2025, we have an exciting lineup of webinars planned:

- **January** (2 webinars) – Adult Respiratory Vaccine Update (Non-CME) – Speaker: Dr Amy Khan
Women in WOEMA (WOW) – Speakers: Drs. Rupali Das, Bernyce Peplowski, Pam Hymel
- **February** - Physician Quality of Care -Speakers: Drs. David Caretto, Minh Nguyen, Rupali Das, and Rajiv Das
- **March** - International OCC Med Physicians (Australia) – Speaker: Dr. Peter Connaughton
- **April** - A Functional Medicine Approach to Pain – Speaker: Dr. Ionela Hubbard
- **May** - Traumatic Brain Injury – Speaker: Dr. Diana Kraemer
- **June** - PRP-Regenerative Medicine – Speaker: Dr. Yusef Sayeed
- **September** - Space & Space Flight – Speaker: Dr. Ronak V. Shah

Please enjoy our past webinar recordings and/or register for our upcoming webinars by visiting the Education section on the WOEMA website here: [WOEMA Webinars](#).

We want to express our heartfelt thanks to our esteemed speakers, committed committee members, and engaged audience for contributing to the success of these educational initiatives. Your participation and feedback are essential as we continue to advance excellence in occupational medicine education.

If you are interested or know of any colleagues interested in joining our Education Committee, don't hesitate to get in touch with our Chair, Aisha Chaudhry, MD, MPH, FACOEM @ Aisha.Chaudhry@kp.org.



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