

Chronic Pain in the Workplace: New Perspectives for Occupational Health Practitioners

"Supporting employees with chronic/persistent pain"

17 September 2025

Time: 0900-1230hrs SAST

ONLINE PLATFORM

HPCSA ACCREDITED



SYMPOSIUM OVERVIEW

Chronic pain is the number one global health burden, affecting more people than cancer, heart disease, and diabetes combined (Richmond Stace). Yet it remains poorly understood — even in healthcare and the workplace. For occupational health professionals, this creates a significant challenge. This workshop explores the biological and psychological aspects of chronic pain, with practical strategies to help employees remain productive and supported at work.

Chronic pain is considered a high-impact health problem when it comes to both absenteeism and presenteeism, excessive or otherwise. This workshop is designed to explore the pain experience from a biological and psychological perspective and to assist employers in understanding someone who works with chronic pain. There will be a strong focus on understanding pain in a work context and how employees can best be supported via health and work interventions.

OUR SPEAKERS

- ✦ **Dr Angela Thornton**
Research Associate, Pain-at-Work Study, School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, UK
- ✦ **Dr Obed S. Mphofu**
Occupational Medicine Specialist & Medico-Legal Practitioner, SA
- ✦ **Dr Wendy J, Chaplin**
Research Fellow, Pain-At-Work Study, School of Health Sciences and NIHR Nottingham Biomedical Research Centre.
- ✦ **Pain SA - TBA**



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BENEFITS OF ATTENDING

Chronic pain and musculoskeletal problems remain one of the leading causes of long-term work absence, making it vital that OH professionals have the skills to assess, treat, and manage employees with chronic pain successfully. Participants will have an opportunity to:

- **Understand** the correct clinical diagnosis of chronic pain in a workplace setting
- **Assess and treat** biopsychosocial obstacles to recovery in chronic pain and MSDs
- **Address** psychological factors that prevent recovery, with a desire to improve consultations and employee outcomes
- **Discuss** extensively the role of case management in prolonged pain in the workplace.
- **Develop** practical skills to assist line managers in return-to-work programs for affected employees.

WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- Occupational medicine practitioners
- Occupational health nurses
- Occupational therapists
- Employee wellness practitioners/managers
- EAP managers
- Case managers
- HR managers
- Legal and risk managers
- Health and safety managers
- Insurance managers
- Medical aid companies

AGENDA

09H00-10H00

Clinical diagnosis of chronic pain: A workplace setting

- ✓ Common errors clinicians make in the clinical diagnosis of chronic pain
- ✓ The epidemiology of chronic pain
- ✓ Understanding back pain from a psychological perspective
- ✓ How to avoid common errors when assessing and treating back pain

10H00-10H10 Short break

10H10-11H00

Management and treatment of chronic pain

- ✓ Clinical guidelines
- ✓ Psychological guidelines
- ✓ Occupational therapy guidelines

11H00-11H10 Short break

11H10-12H00

Working and returning to work through chronic pain

- ✓ Impact of pain on work ability and employment
- ✓ Assessing pain and co-morbidities
- ✓ Evidence-based interventions for RTW programs
- ✓ The integrated role of case managers and occupational therapists

12H00-12H30

Digital approaches to chronic pain assessment, diagnosis, and treatment

- ✓ Emerging digital trends to manage chronic pain amongst employees.
- ✓ Digital therapeutics in pain treatment

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