

This series provides insight into the careers of retired and actively serving occupational physicians. The interview series has supported a collaboration amongst our peers in developing projects on compiling the history of occupational medicine. On this occasion, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr Teri Lillington.

Dr Farhan Shahzad, Consultant Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Sydney

Farhan: Please give us an insight into your career and tell us about yourself.

Teri: I wanted to be a doctor since the age of 7 as I was fascinated with how things worked and why people did what they did.

I completed Medical School at Flinders University in South Australia. Professor Dean Southgate was teaching Community Medicine and I became interested in the idea of preventive medicine.

I planned to do Public Health Medicine and then a friend suggested working in an industrial injury clinic. From the start, I was utterly hooked on occupational medicine. It was so interesting understanding what people did for work, how they could fall ill or become injured at work, and what made work good for them.

I worked at the clinic and then at an abattoir which was a fantastic learning experience for an occupational physician. In 1991, I secured a role at the Adelaide Refinery which interestingly was held by Dean Southgate who had suddenly passed away. I completed my training and fellowship in 1994 and went on to win the Dean Southgate Award.

I worked part time at the Adelaide Refinery for 12 years whilst I raised my family. My work covered the Refinery, airport refuellers and workers at the Birkenhead Terminal. I was learning more about the industry and how to work effectively within large corporations.

In 2003, I became the Oceania Health Manager for Shell. I covered all health operations from Tahiti to the Cook Islands and the Marshall Islands to New Zealand. These countries had different levels of healthcare and hazards which related to the industry and location where people worked.

In 2012, I moved to the Netherlands to work as the ERCIS (Europe, Russia, Commonwealth of Independent States) Health Manager to look after the health operations for Shell across a quarter of the world including Ireland through to Sakhalin (a Russian island north of Japan) and Greenland down to Turkey.

We had real diversity in workplaces including very remote locations, small exploration geoscience teams, shipping, aviation, small gas plants, large refineries, offshore platforms, truck drivers, business travellers to very large, major operations.

Farhan: What are some of your career highlights?

Teri: In 2018, I became the global head for what was called Human Performance & Care at Shell. I had to really try and understand what enabled employees to be at their best and how we could create a culture that supported that. If you really want to make a difference, you need to have deep, systemic support for

health and wellbeing through an organisation that gets into policy, process, leadership training and organisational culture.

I was involved in the global welfare and accommodation guide for migrant workers at Shell. This went beyond good, safe accommodation into things like connectivity with home, providing good quality culturally sensitive food, effective health and psychological support, and enabling opportunities for people to learn and gain further qualifications. It was a chance to say, *“let’s help people develop and grow if they’d like to. Let’s provide services and support to enable that to happen. How do we think about important areas like equity and dignity in work?”* This guideline meant we could positively touch the lives of thousands of contractors each year.

One other part of my role was creating the Shell Resilience Programme. We measured data to see if it was working which is unusual for mental health programmes in workplaces as they are not often monitored for effectiveness. We demonstrated that we not only improved people’s resilience but improved things like employee engagement which made a difference to their safety. The programme’s still running and is now shared with schools in the Netherlands and with some people Shell has supported such as displaced people in Nigeria. I’m so proud of the programme that actually makes a difference and is utilised by groups outside the organisation.

I’ve had many fascinating experiences like going offshore to drill ships, carrying out health and safety audits in Siberia, do helicopter underwater escape training, and visit camps in Oman and our remote operations in Kazakhstan.

Farhan: What message do you have for trainees and fellows?

Teri: I’m a member of the Faculty Policy and Advocacy Committee which does things like review the public health strategies in Australia and NZ. I also sit on a national committee called the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance which is made up of national organisations such as the ACTU, Business Council of Australia, Black Dog, Beyond Blue and the Mental Health Commission who are committed to assist Australian workplaces to be more mentally healthy.

To my colleagues, be clear with yourself as to your purpose in life. What drives and motivates you? When you understand what that is, find work that aligns with those values because that way, you have more fun, it’s exciting and good for your health. Think broadly about occupational medicine. Go beyond the treatment of occupational injury and illness to how can we prevent this happening and what ways can we promote good health at work. The voice we have is important. When we see things we believe could change for the better, speak up and use that voice to help promote good health, good work, and healthy workplaces.