

Forty years of the Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine



Clinical Institute of
Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine

KNOWLEDGE
EXPERIENCE
COOPERATION



University Medical Centre Ljubljana,
Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine

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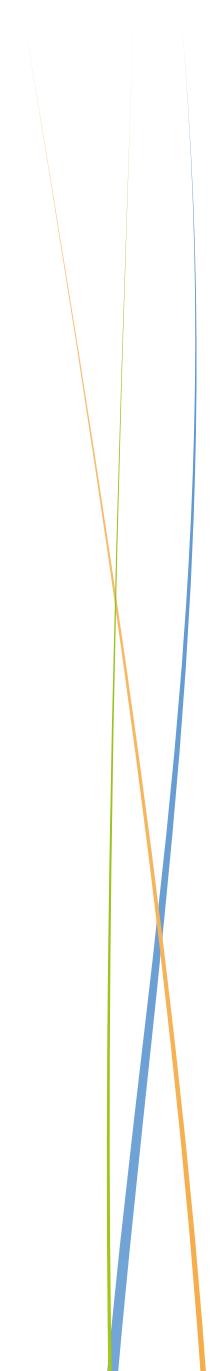
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FOREWORD BY THE HEAD OF THE INSTITUTE



Dear Reader,

Anniversaries are an opportunity for congratulations and praise, but at the same time they also represent a moment to consider where we are and what still needs to be done. Forty years is a short period in the life of an institute, but it is more or less an entire career for a worker. It is therefore appropriate to consider what kind of role workers have played in occupational medicine during these forty years.

During our residency, we were taught that we must take care of workers, that we have the right to make decisions on their ability to work, to decide whether they are well-suited for the jobs they are to perform, and whether work is dangerous for them; we were taught how to protect workers. We often unwillingly made decisions contrary to workers' preferences, but we were fully convinced that we were protecting them.

Then, in 1999, the new Occupational Health and Safety Act was passed—a law that made it possible for specialists of occupational medicine to market their services. As such, we were paid by the same employer that was paying the employee. We did not shape this law ourselves; it was created by politicians that did not understand that it caused difficulty for physicians because it took away their independence. As a result, it often happens that, in the triangle of loyalty including the employee and employer, the physician unwillingly follows and takes into account the wishes of the one paying for the service. The last ten years have thus been a time when it was difficult to say that employee health was always the top priority; there are still many undetected occupational diseases. However, even during this period, we specialists of occupational medicine believed that we were working for the benefit of workers—who remained only mute observers.

We are entering a time when workers are assuming an active role but, on the other hand, they still expect their physicians

to make decisions for them; they expect someone to take care of their limitations, disabilities, and illnesses. However, reality has already passed them by: the disabled can be fired!

Now is the time when specialists of occupational medicine will have to change their role from that of a decision-maker to an advisor that works in a team, cares for a group of workers, advises them, and determines their needs. Specialists of occupational medicine need to promote the health on both sides, the employee's and the employer's, so that workers will know how to live healthy lives and also how to work in a way that is both healthy and good. Here there is no longer a boundary between work and free time because this involves a specific lifestyle and promoting health! It is necessary to create a healthy environment for workers to be able to do this. Not only employers, but also politicians must create an environment and offer healthy choices that encourage, motivate, and strengthen citizens and workers. Are we up to the challenge of this time?

For all these years our institute has worked not only in occupational medicine, but also traffic and sports medicine, which are becoming increasingly specialized and will warrant special attention in the coming decade. Just as the boundary between free time and work is disappearing, the boundary between various activities is increasingly blurred. Today is a time of employment difficulties, economic recession, and negative demographic indicators. This is why it is also the time when all stakeholders—not only specialists in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine, but also politicians, employers, and especially workers—must hew to a basic guideline: that people today live healthily, are active in sports, are safe in traffic, and most of all work well in a safe and healthy working environment.

Ass. Prof. Metoda Dodič Fikfak, MD, DSc

LOOKING AT THE PAST



Milestones

The Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine started operating in 1971. It was founded based on:

- The resolution on founding the Socialist Republic of Slovenia Institute of Occupational Medicine at the Ljubljana Central Hospital, which was adopted by the board of the Clinical Hospitals on 3 December 1970 based on a recommendation by the Slovenian Health Centre of 25 March 1970 and based on resolutions of the medical board of 22 October 1970 and the executive committee of the Clinical Hospitals of 13 November 1970. The School of Medicine also supported founding the institute;
- A decision of 9 September 1971, in which the Slovenian Secretariat for Health and Social Security determined that the Institute of Occupational Medicine, as a so-called "organization of associated labour" as part of the Clinical Hospitals in Ljubljana, fulfilled the conditions regarding premises, equipment, and staff for its initial phase of development.

Up to 1981 only certain planned centres were developed, and these generally had very limited staffing, limited premises, and a lack of suitable equipment:

- The Centre for Specimen Out-Patient Departments;
- The Centre for Traffic Safety with the Traffic Safety Out-patient Department;
- The Centre for Radiological Protection with the Out-patient Department for Protecting Employee Health against Sources of Ionizing Radiation;
- The Centre for Occupational Diseases;
- The Centre for Specialist Consultants; and
- The Centre for Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Physiology.

Up to 1991 the following centres developed the most:

- The Centre for Occupational Diseases and Assessment of Ability to Work;
- The Centre for Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Psychology;
- The Centre for Sports Medicine and Recreation;
- The Centre for Specimen Out-patient Departments; and
- The Centre for Specialist Consultants.

The remaining planned centres developed very little or not at all.

The period after 1991:

- All the centres have been retained and developed intensively;
- The year 2004 marked the beginning of the Workplace Health Promotion Centre;
- Much attention has been paid to employee training, the result being that 3 employees have finished their doctoral studies, three of them have obtained the title of assistant professor and three have received master's degrees.

Heads of the Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine to date



Prof. Samo Modic, MD,
DSc, 1971–1992



Jože Šamu, MD, MSc,
1992–1993



Tatjana Šilc, MD,
1993–1995



Majda Mandelc Grom, MD,
1995–2000



Ass. Prof. Metoda Dodič
Fikfak, MD, DSc, 2000

Development of the Institute of Occupational Medicine

Predecessors to the institute

The protection of employee health in Slovenia goes back to the seventeenth century, when prominent medical experts of the time (Giovanni Antonio Scopoli and Balthasar Hacquet) oversaw miners' health at the mercury mine in Idrija. More organised and professional measures for protecting employee health began only after the Second World War. As part of the Central Hygiene

Institute, which was founded in 1951, the Department for Occupational Hygiene was also founded, part of which was the Central Clinic for Occupational Diseases. In 1960 the entire department was transferred to the newly-founded Slovenian Institute of Health and Technical Welfare. At that point occupational hygiene expanded into the field of occupational medicine, which, in addition to occupational hygiene, also encompassed occupational psychophysiology, occupational diseases, and assessment of ability to work.

In line with legislation adopted in 1955, factory clinics were established at companies. From 1955 to 1967, occupational hygiene departments and occupational diseases departments were established as part of regional hygiene institutes at major industrial centres; for example, in Celje, Kranj, Ljubljana, and Maribor. The 1967 law on the organization of healthcare activities abolished these departments and independent factory clinics or merged them with occupational medicine clinics at healthcare centres.

In 1968 the Slovenian Health Centre adopted expert opinions on the organization and operational scope of occupational medicine units, which were amended the following year. These opinions defined the goals, tasks, and operational areas of factory clinics and occupational outpatient clinics, as well as positions on top professionals in occupational medicine.

Founding and development of the institute

The plans to establish the Slovenian Institute of Occupational Medicine in Ljubljana were developed from 1968 to 1971. The expert committee of the Slovenian Secretariat for Health and Social Welfare decided on 31 August 1971 that establishing an institute of occupational medicine at the Ljubljana Clinical Hospitals was in line with Slovenia's healthcare programme and that all of the conditions were fulfilled for the institute to begin operating. Through a decision from the Slovenian Secretariat for Health and Social Welfare, the Institute of Occupational Medicine was founded on 9 September 1971 as a so-called "organization of associated labour" as part of the Ljubljana Clinical Hospitals. In its first decades, the Institute of Occupational Medicine earned a reputation as a learning centre for graduate study and specialization in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine. During this time the following centres or units of the institute were founded:

- The Centre for Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Psychology;
- The Centre for Sports Medicine and Recreation;
- Two Specimen Out-Patient Departments;
- The Centre for Specialist Consultant Physicians;
- The Centre for Research and Education; and
- The Centre for Assessing Ability to Work.

Slovenian research and social policy during this time was unable to achieve the institute's anticipated inclusion of certain units of the Slovenian Institute for Occupational Safety (the Sector for Occupational Medicine, the Centre for Radiological Protection, the Sector for Traffic Safety, and the Laboratory for Ecology and Toxicology).

From the very beginning, the institute had to deal with a lack of funds, and so it was compelled to partially finance itself through routine work in basic healthcare.

** This text is summarized from the following article: Kocijančič M, Urdih Lazar T. Medicina dela v Sloveniji – pogled v preteklost. Glasnik KIMDPŠ 2007; 2(1): 19–22.*

The Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine today

In recent years the institute has introduced new operational features that are typical of similar institutions in Europe and throughout the world. Slovenia's membership in the European Union demands the development of a doctrine on employee health in line with EU conventions and directives on occupational health and safety.

The institute's main activities include occupational diseases and assessing ability to work, the ergonomics and occupational physiology, industrial toxicology and industrial hygiene, occupational epidemiology, traffic health and safety, occupational psychology and humanization of work, workplace health promotion, and sports medicine.

The institute's greatest challenges include shaping a doctrine for verifying occupational diseases, monitoring chronic influences of contaminants in the workplace, and studying the influence of psychosocial factors on employee health. The institute seeks to strengthen the development of workplace health promotion, which has been considerably neglected so far. Numerous studies have shown that raising the awareness of healthy work and lifestyle along with changing the workplace to promote health benefits not only workers, but also the company and society as a whole. At the same time, based on data on sick leave and workplace injuries, it is clear to us that the Slovenian workforce still suffers from preventable diseases and injuries.

The institute organises many training seminars and conferences for physicians specializing in occupational medicine and for other experts dealing with the health of workers, drivers, and athletes. In cooperation with the Chair of Public Health, it helps offer the graduate programme in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine, and those doing their residencies in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine do much of their work at the institute. Publishing activity (the journal *Sanitas et labor*, the institute's newsletter, research volumes, manuals, etc.) is also becoming increasingly important.

Main activities

Research

- The influence of asbestos on human health
- Genetic risk factors for the development of asbestos-related diseases
- The influence of hypoxia on the sensitivity of heart rhythm
- Development of an availability-humanization model to promote wellbeing and a positive atmosphere in the workplace



- A comprehensive model of interdisciplinary occupational advising
- The influence of electromagnetic radiation on people's health
- Defining criteria for assessing ability to work
- Presenteeism at workplace
- The relationship of Slovenian management to employee health and to health-promotion programmes
- The scope of alcohol and other drug use
- The influence of company restructuring on employee health
- The scope of workplace bullying
- The health of migrant workers
- Low-educated workers' preferences for health promotion

Professional activity

- Verifying occupational diseases in Slovenia
- Interdisciplinary expert group for verifying occupational diseases due to asbestos exposure
- Special committee for traffic
- Special physicians' committee
- Tertiary interdisciplinary consultation team of pulmonologists and occupational, traffic, and sports medicine specialists
- The "Fit for Work" workplace health promotion programme
- European workplace health promotion projects (Dragon Fly: shaping national forums for workplace health promotion; Workhealth I and II: monitoring employee health in Europe from the perspective of public health; Move Europe: promoting a healthy lifestyle at the workplace; MentHealthWork: promoting mental health at work; PHWork: promoting healthy work for workers with chronic diseases; SIWHP: promoting workplace health as a way to strengthen professional knowledge for occupational, traffic, and sports medicine specialists)



Education

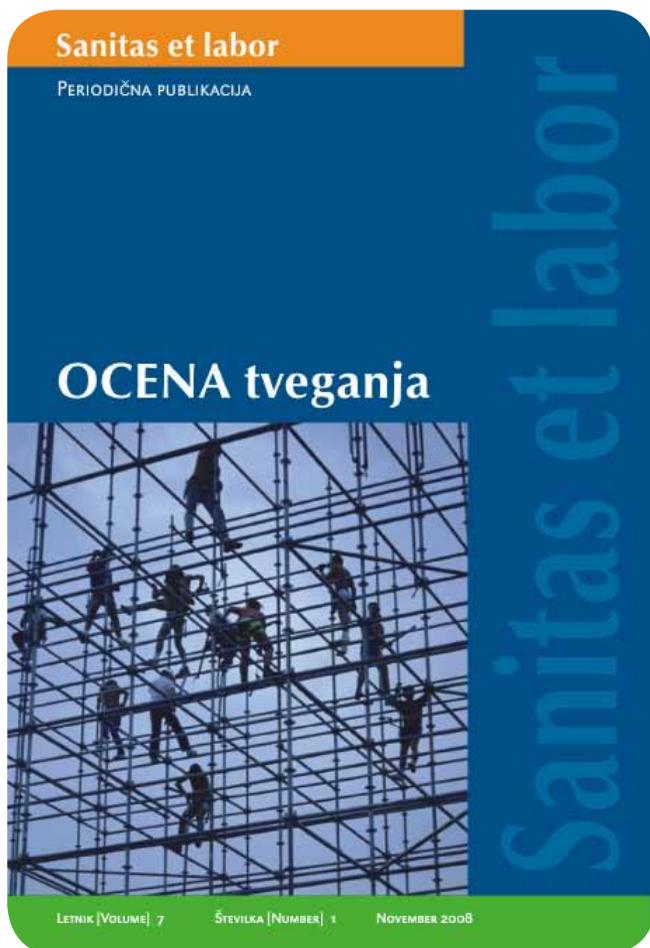
- Regular continuing education for physicians - specialist of occupational, traffic, and sports medicine
- Coordinating graduate study in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine in cooperation with the Chair of Public Health at the Medical School, University of Ljubljana
- Offering a programme in the course Occupational Psychology for undergraduates in the Department of Technical Safety, Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology, University of Ljubljana



- Training for undergraduates at the Medical School, University of Ljubljana, for the course Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine
- Clinic-based training in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine for full-time and part-time healthcare students at the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ljubljana
- Participation in the undergraduate programme in applied kinesiology at the Faculty of Mathematics, Natural Science, and Information Technology, University of Primorska
- Offering a programme in the course Ergonomics for industrial design students at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana
- Participation in offering a programme for residents in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine
- Education for workplace health promoters
- Holding professional conferences and seminars

Publishing

- The journal *Sanitas et labor* (research and discussion articles)
- Research volumes (Youth and Labour; European Research on Alcohol and Other Drugs, Slovenia 2007; Illicit Drug Use in the General Population, 18–65, in Slovenia in 2008; Low-Educated Employees Towards Health; Health in Restructuring (HIRES): Recommendations, National Responses, and Policy Issues in the EU)
- Verifying Occupational Diseases in Slovenia
- Textbook: Workplace Health Promotion: Definitions, Methods, and Techniques (in preparation)
- Manual for Workplace Health Promoters
- Informative material as part of the “Fit for Work” programme and European projects for workplace health promotion
- The institute’s newsletter



Cooperation

Cooperation with Slovenian organizations:

- The Slovenian Ministry of Health and the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, and Social Affairs
- Professional chambers and associations: the Medical Chamber of Slovenia; the Chamber of Nurses and Midwives: the Slovenian Union of Professional Societies of Nurses and Midwives; the Slovenian Chamber of Physiotherapists; the Association for Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine of the Slovenian Medical Association; the Association for Physical and Rehabilitative Medicine of the Slovenian Medical Association the Section for Preventive Medicine of the Slovenian Medical Association; the Slovenian Physiotherapists Society; the Slovenian Toxicology Society; the Slovenian Psychologists Society; the Slovenian Designers Society; the Slovenian Public Relations Society; the Slovenian Union of Human Resources Societies; and the Disabled Athletes Union: the Paralympic Committee
- Educational institutions: the Medical School, University of Ljubljana; the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ljubljana; the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology, University of Ljubljana; the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana; the Faculty of Sports, University of Ljubljana; the Academy of Fine Arts and Design, University of Ljubljana; the Faculty of Mathematics, Natural Science, and Information Technology, University of Primorska; the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska; and the Slovenian Adult Education Centre
- Healthcare institutions: the Slovenian Health Insurance Institute; the Slovenian Institute of Public Health; regional healthcare institutes; the Ljubljana Oncology Institute; Golnik Hospital; and the Soča University Rehabilitation Institute of Slovenia
- Social partners: the Slovenian Union of Free Trade Unions; the 90 Confederation of Trade Unions; the Slovenian Employers Association; the Slovenian Association of Employers in Craft and Small Business; the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce; and the Slovenian Chamber of Crafts
- Other: the Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia; Slovenian Philanthropy; the National Network for Cooperation with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work; the Society of Asbestos Patients; the Institute for Non-Ionizing Radiation; and the Institute for the Development of Social Responsibility

Cooperation with organizations abroad

- Professional organizations and universities: the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell); ASTREES, Paris; the University of Perugia, Italy; the University of Trieste, Italy; the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine (NIOM), Łódź, Poland; the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH); the Prevent Institute for Workplace Health and Safety, Brussels; and the Department of Occupational Health, WHO Regional Office for Europe
- Professional associations and networks: the Section for Medical Work at the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS); the European Association of Schools of Occupational Medicine (EASOM); the European Network for Workplace Health Promotion (ENWHP); and the International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment (IAWBH)
- Other: the BKK Federal Association, Essen, Germany, and the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS), London UK

Organizational structure

The activity of the Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine is divided among the following centres:

The Centre for Occupational Diseases and Assessing Ability to Work

The centre's main tasks are verifying occupational diseases, preparing and improving verification criteria for recognizing occupational diseases in Slovenia (clinical guidelines), assessing workers' ability to work, working as expert witness at court, and epidemiology of the working and living environment.

The Centre for Traffic Health and Safety

A special medical committee operates as part of the centre to resolve complaints about first-instance opinions on the ability to operate motor vehicles or in the case of revoking a driver's license. The centre participates in preparing expert bases for laws and executive acts connected with road-traffic health and safety.



The Centre for Ergonomics and Physiology of Work

This centre is being established and its goal is to study ergonomic aspects of work and the workplace, and to shape recommendations for user-friendly workplaces and for functional diagnosis of workers.

The Centre for Psychology

The centre's goal is greater humanization of work and studying the reasons that give rise to stress, worker availability, and chronic consequences of the long-term effects of contaminants on organic and behavioural disturbances. The centre carries out the following psychological examinations: assessment of ability to work, vocational guidance, examinations at the request of the Slovenian Health Insurance Institute, before employment,



periodic psychological examinations based on risk assessment and at employers' request, and psychological examinations for drivers and athletes.

The Centre for Sports Medicine

The centre provides services at the secondary and tertiary levels for top Slovenian athletes. Its goal is to monitor the health status of top athletes in all phases of the training process, to develop and monitor doctrinaire premises for sports medicine, and to strengthen professional and research connections between the institutions in Slovenia involved with the health of top athletes.



The Centre for Health Promotion

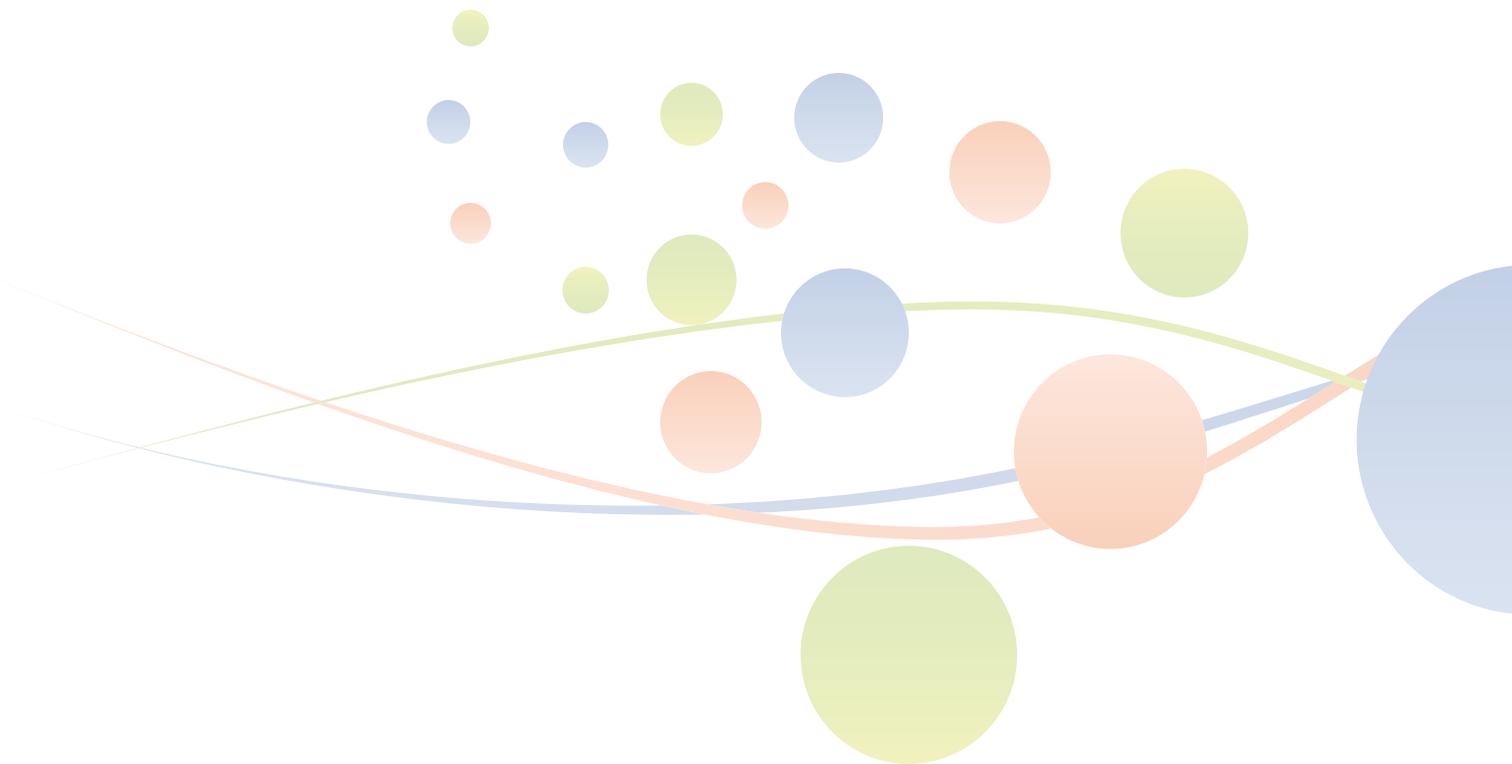
Employees at this centre prepare professional opinions to reduce sick leave, disability, workplace injury, and occupational diseases as well as to inform labour organizations and their managers, workers, and policy decision-makers about the advantages provided by comprehensive care for employee health, also known as workplace health promotion.

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The main goals of further efforts by the institute will be to further develop the doctrine on protecting employee health, to combine secondary and tertiary activity, and to bring the work of occupational, traffic, and sports medicine closer to the experiences of certain European countries, especially those in Scandinavia, and other developed countries.

In addition, the institute shall strive to:

- Train as many university instructors as possible in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine;
- Acquire new associates for research and development;
- Strengthen its departments (centres) that are key for the profession;
- Obtain new projects and funding from EU funds and to disseminate new knowledge among future specialists in occupational, traffic, and sports medicine as well as experts in other fields whose task is to safeguard employee health;
- Build a new building for the institute, thereby uniting the two separate units in one location.





University Medical Centre Ljubljana,
Clinical Institute of Occupational, Traffic, and Sports Medicine

November 2011