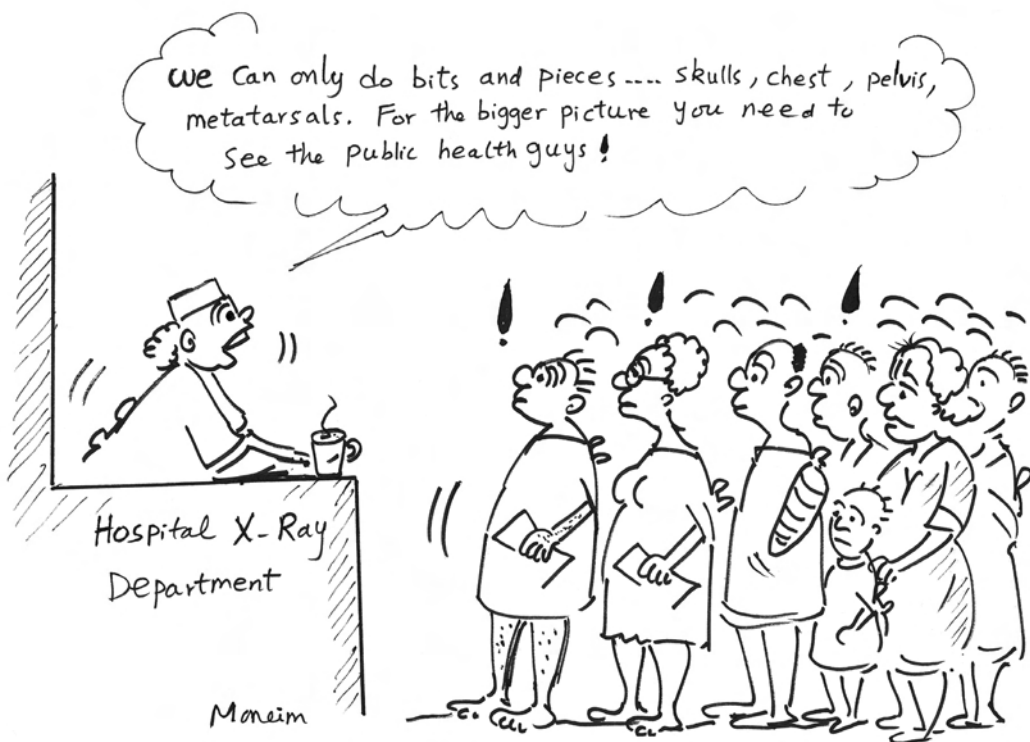


Public Health

Specialise in 'the bigger picture'



FACULTY OF
PUBLIC HEALTH

Are you **passionate**? Do you possess the **drive and vision** to make all our lives better by improving how and where we live?

Are you a **leader, facilitator and skilled communicator**?

A **strategic and critical thinker** whose field of vision always encompasses the 'bigger picture'?

Do you enjoy **statistics** and finding **evidence-based solutions** to complex problems?

And do you believe that we all have the right to better health?

Have you considered specialising in public health?

Public Health

What exactly is public health?

Public health is about improving and protecting the health of groups of people, rather than about treating individual patients. Public health consultants must look at 'the bigger picture' and then take action to promote healthy lifestyles, prevent disease, protect and improve general health, and improve healthcare services. The 'population' they are working for could be a rural community, an entire city, or the global population, but the principles remain the same.

What is a public health consultant?

Leading a cross-section of organisations and individuals, public health consultants strive to realise ways of making our communities and our environments healthier, and more capable of providing us with what we need for optimal health. They are 'upstream thinkers' – preventing people from being thrown into the river in the first place, rather than fishing them out downstream, coughing and spluttering.

Where do they work?

Public health reaches far beyond the usual confines of NHS structures. It pulls together skills and people from a wide range of disciplines. Public health consultants will therefore most often work for, and across, organisations to improve the health of a certain population group. These include local NHS organisations, national and local government agencies and authorities, the military, the Health Protection Agency, local community organisations, voluntary or academic institutions and the World Health Organisation amongst others. Most of those who do specialise in public health work in the public sector.

What does their work involve?

Leaders in public health must be diverse in their capabilities: creative in their ability to visualise change, meticulous and organised in making it happen, and then monitoring the results.

They take on the challenge of extremely varied and often unpredictable workloads. Timescales for getting projects up and running can be long and require a great deal of negotiation, but a good public health consultant will be able to handle the challenge of this, providing the leadership and management skills necessary to see projects through to completion. They seldom, if ever, work on one project at a time, and must also be able to respond to emergencies as they arise.

Public Health is . . .
"The science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society."

Sir Donald Acheson

To do the job, they must have a broad understanding of all the factors that contribute to health, the structure of healthcare systems and services, current government policy, and how to effectively interpret available data.

They have to evaluate evidence to devise and implement strategies to improve and protect health, and to improve health services.

Public health consultants need to be both tough negotiators and simultaneously possess good powers of persuasion to get the community, other stakeholder organisations and politicians to agree and work effectively towards common goals.



Some consultants will become experts in a specific area of public health, while others will find that their job incorporates a cross-section of public health activities and/or research. However, their work usually falls within one or all of the following three domains: **improving health, protecting health or improving health services.**

Improving health

Individual behaviour is not the only factor that contributes to a person's state of 'wellness'; a complex set of social, economic, political and environmental factors influence this. These 'wider determinants' are vitally important to health.

Improving health therefore also means reducing inequalities in society and improving access to education, housing and employment. Although these areas have traditionally been beyond the scope of the NHS, they have such a great impact on the service that they can no longer be ignored. Public health consultants must work with the community, other relevant organisations and politicians to develop and implement local and national policies to encourage healthy lifestyle choices and reduce risk factors.

They must then monitor and evaluate how effective their strategies are through the surveillance of diseases and risk factors.

Protecting health

Infectious diseases, chemicals and radiation are among the factors that can threaten the health of a large portion of any given population. Public health consultants must understand and continually monitor these threats and plan and manage prevention strategies, and any required emergency responses.

Environmental health hazards, such as flooding and pollution, are other possible dangers that they may have to deal with, and some consultants choose to specialise in environmental health.

Isobel Duckworth, Trainee

My varied educational background includes a general nursing qualification, a masters in health psychology, and a management qualification.

I have worked in public health through the NHS and local authorities for the last 15 years. I also worked as a volunteer through Voluntary Service Overseas in Eastern Europe. I made the decision to enter public health training after discussion with trainees already on the programme.

I am now part of a supportive public health team, working to reduce health inequalities through a community empowerment approach. My work currently includes health needs assessments for maternity and alcohol services, the evaluation of a domestic abuse project, the introduction of public health into community pharmacies, and pilot work on health trainers.

Improving health and social services

A public health consultant working to improve health and social care services must continually take stock of the health and social care needs of their population, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of the services that they have access to. Managing and improving healthcare services requires excellent leadership skills and strategic decision-making to improve the systems in place.

Key skills and knowledge

Epidemiology is the cornerstone of public health practice. It is the study of the distribution and causes of a disease or state of health, and the use of this information to act to prevent or control health problems and diseases.

However, there are a great number of other skills and areas of knowledge which are essential to public health consultants:

- Statistics, handling and interpreting data, and managing health information
- Demography
- Medical sociology
- Social policy
- Health economics
- Communicable diseases
- Budgeting, leadership and people management
- Health needs assessment, health impact assessments and health equity audits
- Critical appraisal and research.

“ I have a real, hands-on opportunity to improve healthcare services for some very deprived populations. ”

Liz Scott, Medical Director

The great thing about a career in public health is that it can take you in a multitude of different directions. My background was in surgery and I've always had an interest in acute services. I managed the Leeds review of acute hospital, services which combined major project work with strategic thinking and intense work with clinicians and managers.

My next job was director of public health for Leeds. The five years I spent getting to know the community and its health services well, and seeing the improvements in health and health services that can be brought about, was an immense privilege.

When they advertised for the implementation director for the new consultant contract in England I doubt they envisaged a public health doc, but that was what they got. That job taught me that I really enjoy running seminars and workshops, and debating issues with a wide range of people.

But now it's the variety of working in an acute trust that I enjoy the most. I have a real, hands-on opportunity to improve healthcare services for some very deprived populations. No two days are ever the same – preparing for a Foundation Trust assessment, dealing with a clinical problem, resolving a difficult ethical issue, planning service development, working out how on earth we are going to cope with the impact of Modernising Medical Careers – the list and challenges are endless, but that's why I love this job.

What are the career prospects?

Public health offers a very wide range of career opportunities – from major management posts to specialised roles with substantial clinical content. Many public health consultants change jobs several times in the course of their career, taking on different challenges in a way that clinical medicine seldom offers. There is also great scope to practise abroad.

What is the future of the speciality?

There will be a need for public health specialists for as long as there are avoidable health problems and health inequalities to be tackled. The nature of practice has changed, just as the nature of the major health problems changes: preventable chronic diseases are now increasingly competing with infection. But with HIV, drug-resistant bacteria and the threat of a flu pandemic, public health is having to dust off old skills as well as learn new ones.

“I was attracted to the speciality as a result of working as a newly qualified doctor in a developing country, and realising that clinical competence is only a small part of delivering healthcare. Competent organisation and the management of resources to ensure that services reach those most in need is essential, and just as relevant as direct patient care. The use of information to achieve this is a continuing and unfinished task.”

Hugh Sanderson, Information Lead for a Cancer Network



Is public health for me?

Public health consultants come from a wide range of professional backgrounds – from information analysis and economics to epidemiology, nursing or clinical medicine. They are employed in a variety of environments and organisations, usually working at a strategic or senior management level, leading multidisciplinary public health teams.

“The main challenge and satisfaction is keeping health services focused on people and patients. It is great to work with so many different types of people, and allows me to bring a public health perspective to the business of planning and delivering care.”

Phil Ayres, Deputy Medical Director

Public health requires a passion for improving health and reducing inequalities in health. You will be interested in why people become ill, how this can be prevented, as well as how they can be treated. You will also be interested in how organisations and society can be changed to bring about better health.

Some examples of recent priorities for public health work include reducing smoking rates and protecting people from environmental tobacco smoke, looking at ways of reducing obesity and alcohol consumption, and new ways of delivering care for older people.

Tackling such problems means working with a wide range of people of all sorts, perhaps managing big budgets and large numbers of staff, perhaps operating as a passionate advocate for change. This sort of work often has long timescales, results taking years to achieve, but if you have the enthusiasm and drive to carry you through, your work can have a lasting impact on many thousands of people.

Training in public health

What knowledge and skills do I need to apply?

- An understanding of, and commitment to, public health and its application
- Good verbal and written communication skills – the ability to listen, present, facilitate and negotiate effectively, and to adapt language usage appropriately to the setting
- Good team working and leadership skills – working in multidisciplinary, non-hierarchical structures and in a collaborative manner
- A broad, strategic outlook and vision, and the ability to manage change

- Research and critical appraisal skills, with a good understanding of epidemiology and statistics
- Self-reliance and self-motivation
- The ability to prioritise, plan and work on your own initiative
- A desire to keep learning
- Good IT skills

Further entry requirements

For doctors:

- Full GMC registration.
- Completion of an F2 programme, or the equivalent competencies.
- Entrants with a longer period of clinical or other postgraduate experience are welcome.

For those from other backgrounds:

- Either a good first degree (minimum 2:1) in a subject relevant to public health, a higher degree (i.e. Masters or PhD), or a health professional qualification e.g. nursing. Relevant degrees could include any of the health sciences, such as clinical psychology and pharmacology, or other subject areas where the relevance can be shown – e.g. environmental science.
- At least three years' post-degree work experience in an area relevant to public health.
- Entrants with a longer period of postgraduate experience are welcome.
- Experience of the management of healthcare services, or work that has provided insight into the challenges of accessing health services would be beneficial.

Andrew Furber, Consultant in Public Health Medicine

I have no typical day I'm pleased to say – every day is different in form and content. This month I have had meetings about cross government TB policy, supported the development of Department of Health commissioning policy, sat on the appointment panel for a senior local government manager and been interviewed by the BBC World Service.

With the variety comes the challenge of keeping on top of a broad portfolio of work. But it also brings the satisfaction of being able to see the 'big picture' and to be in a position to influence decisions that affect health and wellbeing.

After training in general practice in the UK, I spent a number of years working overseas in less developed countries. I quickly realised the most effective way to improve health was to tackle the broader determinants of health such as poverty, education and social exclusion. Even though I am now practising in a different setting, I find I am still addressing the same issues.



...the most effective way to improve health is to tackle the broader determinants of health such as poverty, education and social exclusion.



How does the training programme work?

The typical training programme for specialising in public health is normally five years full time. This usually includes undertaking either one year full time, or two years part time to complete an academic course to provide the essential knowledge for the discipline. Those who already have the necessary knowledge base, or who have already completed a Masters in Public Health will be able to reduce their total training time. Previous experience may also reduce training time, if trainees can show the competencies that they have gained through this experience.

During training, trainees will rotate through various placements in different settings and public health areas. This allows trainees the opportunity to develop the skills to meet their chosen career aims.

Training is organised by deaneries which are in charge of all medical training in a demarcated geographical area. Training placements will usually be within one deanery, but may be across deaneries in special circumstances.

Trainees will be required to sit the Faculty of Public Health's **Part A membership exam** between one and two years after starting the programme, and the **Part B exam** six to nine months later.

The Part A tests trainees' knowledge of the skills they need to specialise, while the Part B exam requires trainees to demonstrate that they can translate their knowledge effectively into practice. Trainees are also supported through ongoing assessment in the workplace.

Once a trainee has passed both exams and has satisfactorily shown that they have gained all the skills required by the curriculum, they will be eligible for specialist registration. Medical trainees will then be able to register with the General Medical Council as specialists, while other graduate trainees will be able to register with the UK Voluntary Register for Public Health Specialists. At

Arpana Verma, Trainee

I was a hospital doctor for more than seven years before being attracted to public health by the epidemiology and research possibilities.

As a trainee in academic public health, I work with other academics, public health professionals, students, local authorities, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence and the Department of Health.

Research is very challenging especially in the short timeframe of training. After the first two years of general public health training, you have to get a further degree (PhD or MD) as well as produce multiple papers and grant income to be able to secure an academic post after training.

Presenting at conferences and getting papers accepted is extremely satisfying, and I also have the privilege of working with great colleagues.

this point all are eligible for consultant or equivalent posts within the NHS.

How flexible is training?

Training in public health is very flexible and encourages trainees to shape their training around their own interests. This involves identifying their interests and skills, even if embryonic, and finding the best ways to develop them.

Part-time training is also possible and trainees may apply for time out of training to work abroad to gain further experience.

Where and when to apply?

There is one recruitment drive per year, with the application process starting in January for posts to be taken up in August of that year. The process is run through a UK-wide system, the Medical Training Application Service – MTAS (www.mtas.nhs.uk). Advertisements for the posts will be placed on the MTAS website.

Alison Coulter, Trainee

Public health is a very diverse area, and so there is a lot of variety in my work. I really enjoy making links between people and organisations – for example, looking at reducing environmental tobacco smoke involved working with people in the primary care trust and in the city council, and with people from all around the UK.

I chose public health because I wanted to look at how best to keep people healthy, and was interested in evidence for the effectiveness of treatments.

I have a geography degree and a background in physiotherapy and NHS management. My job before becoming a public health trainee was as Cancer Services Manager for an acute hospital trust.



Need more information?

On whether you are suited to a public health career...

- **The Faculty of Public Health**

The Faculty has further information and a list of faculty advisers who can advise you on the speciality.

www.fph.org.uk

On the training programme in your region...

- **The Faculty of Public Health**

The Faculty has further information and a list of training programme directors for the different regions.

www.fph.org.uk

On applying to the training programme...

- **Medical Training Application Service**

www.mtas.nhs.uk

On how specialist training in the UK works...

- **Modernising Medical Careers**

www.mmc.nhs.uk

- **Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board**

www.pmetb.org.uk

Further sources of information...

- **Conference on Postgraduate Medical Deans**

A source of links to all deaneries

www.copmed.org.uk

- **General Medical Council**

www.gmc-uk.org

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