

An Introduction to Public Health Medicine

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The World Journal of Medical Education and Research (WJMER) is the online publication of the Doctors Academy Group of Educational Establishments. Published on a quarterly basis, it's aim is to promote academia and research amongst all members of the multi-disciplinary healthcare team including doctors, dentists, scientists, and students of these specialties from all parts of the world. The principal objective of this journal is to encourage the aforementioned from developing countries in particular to publish their work. The journal intends to promote the healthy transfer of knowledge, opinions and expertise between those who have the benefit of cutting edge technology and those who need to innovate within their resource constraints. It is our hope that this will help to develop medical knowledge and to provide optimal clinical care in different settings all over the world. We envisage an incessant stream of information will flow along the channels that WJMER will create and that a surfeit of ideas will be gleaned from this process. We look forward to sharing these experiences with our readers in our subsequent editions. We are honoured to welcome you to WJMER.



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Introducing Public Health

Public Health is defined by the Faculty of Public Health as, "The science and art of promoting and protecting health and well-being, preventing ill health and prolonging life through the organised efforts of society."

Exciting and challenging, public health is a true multidisciplinary specialty, allowing the practitioner to regard health as a whole, with the aim of putting preventative strategies in place to improve the general health of the population. Unlike many other specialties public health is not only focused on illness, but also on the promotion of "well-being".

Life as a Public Health Consultant

The three key areas of Public Health are Health Improvement, Improving Services, and Health Protection. The majority of projects that a consultant works on will fall into one of these categories, and will require the specialist to identify areas in a health setting in need of change. They need to have the ability to bring these changes about, and to monitor and assess the efficacy of the whole process.

Usually, specialists will be working on several projects at the same time, and the work involved will range from governmental meetings, to managing an emergency health crisis, to research or teaching. As a result, the workload is highly unpredictable and extremely varied.

Public Health specialists work in a variety of different settings, often outside of the usual constraints of the NHS, and usually within the Public Sector. Examples of these include local NHS organisations, the Military, Academic institutions or international organisations such as the World Health Organisation. Due to the breadth of public health, many consultants refine their specialty even further and focus on the health improvement of a specific population group.

In order to ensure a project continues through to completion, a Public Health specialist may have to liaise and work with a wide range of people from various disciplines, such as politicians, teachers, dieticians and local authorities. The consequences of local action can also contribute to changes on a national level, with guidance recommended by the Department of Health.

Some recent changes as a result of Public Health policy include issues such as nutrition labelling, the health of asylum seekers, the health impacts of climate change, and obesity.

Like any specialty, a career in Public Health has its challenges, most notably through the recent changes in the structure of the Public Health system. One of its most notable drawbacks is the lack of hands on clinical practice, and so specialists must have a keen interest in addressing the bigger picture. The administration aspects of the job can be off-putting for some, with regular reports, committees and management issues, as well as the challenges of political involvement.

Facts and Figures

The Public Health specialty programme is a run-through pathway; candidates apply at ST1 level, following 2 years of Foundation Training and full GMC registration. It is important to note that as the specialty is not limited to medics, competition for training posts is high; applicants from non-medical backgrounds are often highly qualified. In addition to these requirements, a Masters in Public Health is a desirable quality. Those who have completed this or with other appropriate experience may have a reduced ST training time.

The training programme is split into 3 phases; Phase 1 (ST1/2) is focused on developing a sound knowledge base, Phase 2 (ST2/3) includes an attachment at the Health protection unit, and in Phase 3 (ST3-5) trainees undertake postings in special interest areas.

Recent recommendations by the Centre for Workforce intelligence are that there will be no changes to the number of training posts at ST1 level in the next 3 years. In 2010, 74 posts for ST1 training were available in total, all of which were filled.

The Future

Public Health is a specialty undergoing huge amounts of change. The formation of the new integrated Public Health England service (an amalgamation of the current Health Protection Agency and the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse) will shift control of health services from Primary Care Trusts to Local Authorities (LA). Public Health services in each LA will be lead by a

Director of Public Health, with the aim to integrate other services (such as Education and the Police) to implement appropriate changes at a local level. Nevertheless, the threat of emerging public health crises is persistent, and the need for specialists in the prevention and management of these issues remains.

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