

## Real-life story - Abhayadevi Tissington

Abhayadevi works in Scotland as a nurse consultant in health protection. Among other things, she is responsible for the coordination of immunisation and for giving advice on infection control and health protection in NHS Highland.

Abhayadevi Tissington Nurse consultant health protection

**Employer or university** NHS Highland

**Salary range** ?40k-?50k

### How I got into the role

I was inspired to enter healthcare by an aunt of mine who was a senior nurse and went on a world tour representing the Royal College of Nursing. I first qualified as a nurse (1979) then midwife (1983) then later on a health visitor (1985). This allowed me to spend some time as a 'triple duty' nurse (using all my registered qualifications in a single role) in rural Scotland (on Shetland) and I loved the concept of caring for people 'from cradle to grave'.

Although I had always been interested in infection, it was a secondment to Shetland Public Health Department (1999) that enabled me to gain relevant skills (such as undertaking audits of nurses' knowledge of infection prevention, and infection control practice in GP practices), and eventually successfully apply for the post of nurse consultant in health protection (2001).

I am a registered nurse, midwife and health visitor and have a BA degree in community nursing later followed by an MSc degree in infection control.

### What I do

As a nurse consultant in health protection I work on all aspects of health protection, including immunisation and prevention of infectious diseases. I am based in Inverness and work full time with a small team of colleagues covering two local authority areas (Highland and Argyll & Bute).

A key part of my role is ensuring that up-to-date, evidence-based information is available to staff working in a variety of health and social care settings with regard to health protection, immunisation and prevention of infectious disease. This includes developing relevant guidance and policy as well as being available to advise or answer any queries.

Since 2010 I have been responsible for ensuring that immunisation programmes run smoothly and that staff have access to the right training. In 2006 I was given the opportunity to write the content of an online educational resource, Promoting Effective Immunisation Practice, and this training is now available throughout Scotland.

There is a lot of variety in this job and I need to be able to react immediately to the demands of new cases on a day-to-day basis. For example, I might be notified about a new case of meningitis and have to investigate which friends or family members need antibiotics and then work with their healthcare providers to make sure that they get them.

It can be a challenge dealing with the unexpected and preparing for possible outbreaks of diseases (such as Ebola) and this means I'm constantly keeping track of cases, outbreaks, and actions, and reviewing and re-prioritising work.??

NHS Highland covers a very large geographical area (the size of Denmark) although the population is relatively small. This means much of my work has to be done on the phone, via email and video-conferencing. On the whole this works well and advances in technology have really helped.?

I love my job as it allows me to use all my previous skills and knowledge.

## **The best bits and challenges**

I really enjoy my job and the constant variety and unpredictability. I feel I am learning all the time too. New vaccines are introduced and Government policy changes, and I love that this can take me in a new direction. An example of this is the flu vaccination program for all children aged two to 11 years.? In Scotland we introduced this in all primary schools in 2014. Building immunity in this way means that not only will the immunised children benefit, but also many others in the community, including those who aren't immunised.

I am managed by a consultant in public health (health protection) and work with another full-time colleague and a part-time nurse who specialises in Tuberculosis (TB).? We have good admin support too and I feel I have good control over my own workload and its priorities. I love my job as it allows me to use all my skills and knowledge to influence patient care and shape how services are delivered.??

## **Life outside work**

I only live a mile from base and that's not too far from the centre of Inverness so it's easy enough to pop to the shops after work if I want to.? In my own time I like walking and to read and at the moment I'm also learning Spanish.

## **Career plans and top tips for others**

I feel I have had a long, successful and rewarding career, and when I retire in a couple of years, I'm sure I'll often look back on it with satisfaction.

When I set out I didn't have a clear idea about where I was headed and yet I still ended up in my perfect job! Think about the skills you have. Mine were fine tuned in public health from my years of working in the

community but yours may come from a different setting and still be relevant.? Working to improve the health of the population through the control of infectious disease is a crucial and rewarding area to work in.

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